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CECILE RAYE:

an

Autobiography.

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AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

By MRS BLAKE,

AUTHOR OF "GLENRORA."

LONDON:
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CECILE RAYE.

CHAPTER I.

The Old Farm-House.

BEAUTIFUL ROSEDEAN! how fondly memory lingers around thee! how vividly, after the lapse of many a year, do thy familiar features arise to my mind!

An old-fashioned farm-house, low-roofed and rambling, covered from top to bottom with ivy, jessamine, and climbing roses. In front, a fertile, undulating strath, corn fields, pasturage, gently varied hill and dale, blending in rich warm colours together till lost in the soft blue of the distance. Behind, the lofty Grampian range, with some precipitous rocks as advanced sentinels, close up to which nestled the old farm-house and its offices.

An old-fashioned farm-house! with its low doorway and small, old-fashioned windows; with its little parlour and large dining-room; with its

narrow passages and narrower stairs; with its great kitchen and *musty-fusty* attics; with its queer little bed-rooms, and four-posted beds hung with the cleanest of chintz; with, in short, closets, and corners, and cupboards innumerable, and such as only an old farm-house could contain!

An old-fashioned farm-house, with an older-fashioned garden! rich in great flowering lilacs, in green laurels, in broad bushes of southern wood, in grand, high trees of sweet briar, filling the air with their fragrance; rich, above all, profusely rich, in roses; not fine, new-fangled plants, from which you could scarce pull a bud without it being missed, but old-fashioned roses such as our grandfathers cultivated; many of the bushes as old as the dear old house itself, and yet in their ripe old age producing flowers in lapfuls!

Ay! and many a lapful of them have I, Cecile Raye, gathered; and you will not wonder at me speaking so lovingly of Rosedean and its roses when I tell you that there I spent the sweet days of childhood. And yet it was not my home. My parents lived in the neighbouring town of Dunearn, and I, on the birth of my little sister, and when about two years of age, had been carried off, almost without their consent, to the home that was my mother's before her marriage, by my maiden aunts, to be nursed, petted, possibly spoilt by them and my uncle in the dear old-fashioned farm-house.

There then, under the tender care of Aunt Mar-

garet and Aunt Mary, for four years I reigned supreme. Petting seemed to agree with me, for during all that time I never remember being guilty of an act of disobedience, or of my will running in opposition to my aunts'. A stout, little dimpled thing I have been told I was, with blue eyes, natural flaxen curls, and a complexion like the flowers among which I lived. Even at that age, however, I was more pensive than gay; more disposed to weave ideal dreams than to romp and play; and perhaps my constant companionship with those so much older than myself, tended to foster this peculiarity of my character. Nevertheless, the pleasant way in which those happy years passed have been painted on my memory with affection's brightest hues.

From recollection I can almost picture myself now in red Turkey cotton frock, white pinafore, socks, and slippers, trotting about after one aunt or another if they were busy; or, greatest of pleasures! if one was at leisure, to *cuddle* myself up on her knee, and get her to tell me an old-world story from the Bible, or sing to me a solemn psalm; for sweetly religious was the atmosphere of that old farm-house.

My grandfather, an aged patriarch, was still alive. He had loved and served God from his youth; and though now verging on threescore and ten, he was still realising the precious promise, and bringing forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness in his old age. And a covenant-keeping God had blessed

his children also. My two aunts and my uncle were meek and lowly followers of the Lord Jesus; so that within the walls of that old farm-house all was harmony. The Spirit of peace, of that peace which passeth all understanding, seemed ever to brood over it, and to fill the hearts of its inmates with a holy calm which the world could neither give nor take away.

The religion of the old farm-house did not consist, however, in mere feeling and sentimentalism; but, while ever looking to Him who is invisible, its every member was characterised by an earnest, honest, healthful piety which shewed itself constantly in that diligence in business, in that love which beareth all things, and in that contentment with all God's dealings, which is great gain.

I was too young to understand the secret that flooded the old farm-house with sunshine, though not too young to bend my little knees and raise my little hands in supplication to Him whom, almost without knowing it, I loved; and not too young to join with childish voice "the grave sweet melody" which, morning and evening, arose like incense, and floated upwards from the walls of that old farm-house.

And while religion, the grand old religion of the Bible, was thus the prevailing element, every pleasure was sweetened, every enjoyment was doubled, and many hours of intense happiness had I in and about that old farm-house. Many of these hours

in the sultry summer days I spent in the shadiest part of the garden, filling my hands and lap with fragrant flowers; or up with the dewy dawn, I was off to see the cows milked and the calves fed, drinking my share of the frothy, foaming, new milk with a relish known only to a child. Sometimes I helped to feed the poultry; or, greatest of treats, to watch and tend a mother hen with a whole flock of downy little chicks put out for the first time to sun themselves on a piece of green sward. What tremblings and flutterings of my little heart when a silly chick wandered away from its mother; what secret rejoicings and inward congratulations when, at the fancied risk of being torn to pieces, I succeeded in carrying it carefully in my pinafore and depositing it by her side! And then when the bustle of the morning was past, and the early dinner over, and my aunts in their afternoon gowns sat down to their needlework, looking so nice, and neat, and prim in their snowy habit-shirts, and hair done up in great bows on the crown of the head, I would draw in my little stool to their feet, and listen while they sang one old song after another, or wailed out a plaintive ballad, till, overcome with emotion, I would lay down my head on the singer's knee and sob aloud. Foolish, childish heart! But even old men, I've been told, have been known to weep over these Scotch ballads.

Young as I was, those afternoons made an impression on my mind never to be forgotten. Every-

thing about the old farm-house had a stillness which might be felt. The back door was locked, the kitchen fire smouldered on the hearth, the watch-dog dozed lazily upon his chain; and the only accompaniment to my aunt's singing was the "tick-tick" of the eight-day clock on the staircase, and the buzz of the honey bee as it rose with delight from its feast of nectar in a jessamine flower overhanging the window.

Besides the garden, the cows' meadow, and the poultry-yard, I had, especially as I grew older, other favourite haunts to which the innate poetry of my nature led me. One of these, the sunny slope of a hill side,—"a brae," where the first "gowan" was sure to be found, the first buttercup to raise its yellow head; a brae with furze-covered knolls and tangled masses of golden broom, where wandering turkeys loved to stray and conceal their precious eggs; a brae where the lasses cut broom and the herd boy whistled and whittled sticks in the long summer "gloamin"; and a brae from which the lovely strath could be seen in all its varied breadth and beauty. The other was a deep, deep glen, through which a "burnie" ran, ere in noisy sport it flung itself over a precipitous rock. Its steep sides were clad with feathery ferns, twining ivy, and prickly briars. Dew lingered on its ferns; and cool and moist were its depths when the sun shone in meridian splendour. In its creviced rocks primrose pale, purple violet, and fairy blue-

bell found their home. In solemn grandeur rose its great high trees—in gentle beauty reposed its greensward patches. Sunbeam and cloud ever struggled there; shadows flickered and flitted over grey rock and green fern; pools slumbered in inky blackness or shone like burnished mirrors. Scrambling down its rocky sides, I used to sit and watch with delight those flitting shadows,—those wondrous lights,—or listen to humming insects, sighing winds, and roaring waterfall, wreathing, meanwhile, head, arms, and waist with long branches of creeping ivy, and building wondrously grand and child-like castles in the air! Happy long summer days! leaving, even when gone for ever, a luminous trail of light behind them, and golden recollections which nothing could destroy.

But summer ripened into autumn, and a time came at the farm when no one, not even I, had time for idle musing. Harvest came. Cart-loads of reapers were brought from the neighbouring villages, and every available space about the offices was fitted up for their reception. Then for a month or six weeks nothing was to be seen but swarms of bronzed faces, gleaming sickles, golden corn, great pots of porridge, great barrels of beer, great scones; and nothing to be heard but song, mirth, and laughter. And amid so much hurry and bustle it was wonderful how many little offices devolved upon me; how many little services even my small pair of hands could render!

Many a little journey did I take to the harvest-field daily with flagons of milk, bread and cheese, and bearing innumerable messages from uncle to aunts, from aunts to uncle. Pleasant little journeys they were, with my faithful companion the great watch-dog "Vulcan," released from his chain to accompany and protect me. I should have mentioned him before, for of all things animate or inanimate about the place, Vulcan was the greatest favourite. He was a huge creature, almost as high as myself, with shaggy masses of tawny yellow hair forming his somewhat rough coat; a fine canine development, a large beautiful eye, and withal most noble and generous in his great nature. He was the only playmate I had about the old farm-house, and was always ready to sympathise with all my moods and humours. Was I pensive? he marched demurely by my side; was I gay? he gambolled before me, returning often to jump up and fawn upon me, sometimes almost to upset me with his wild caresses! Poor old Vulcan! I remember many years afterwards shedding tears when I heard of his death, and looking with mournful interest at the spot where he was buried.

But time would fail to tell in detail all my simple pleasures, all my simple duties, during those early years of my life; how I spent whole days, when the weather was wet and prevented me going out of doors, in the old garrets, ransacking

their stores, riding upon a worn out side-saddle (the greatest of my discoveries), bringing to light and tricking myself out in fragments of faded finery, wondering in my heart of hearts what could have induced people to fling such pretty things aside; or how, under Uncle Charlie's care, I would sit in the granary and see the stuff thrashed and cleaned, ropes made of the straw, and bags filled with golden wheat; or how I sometimes ventured among the men and horses in the cornyard, in my anxiety to see a stack taken down and carted away to be thrashed; and the excitement I felt when in such circumstances a huge robber rat, suddenly disturbed by the removal of a sheaf, sprung to the ground, only to be hunted to death by the terriers which were on the outlook for such prey; or how, in the long winter evenings, pleasantest time of all, I sat in my little chair in the coziest corner of the clean, bright kitchen, and saw the soft flax spun into thread for sheeting, and listened to the stories and the gossip of the "lasses," which ever and anon rose above the birr-birr of the spinning wheels.

Thus passed those four happy years—happy in their simple monotony—happy in their simple pleasures—but happier far for the lessons they taught me, and which, though sometimes almost forgotten amid the glare, the glitter, the care, and the anxiety of the world, have ever and again vibrated through my heart like the key-note in a piece of music:—"*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*"

CHAPTER II.

Adieu to Rosedean.

MY pleasant stay at Rosedean was brought to an end by my father appearing somewhat unexpectedly one evening with the avowed intention of taking me home. *Home!* how the word grated upon my ears. Was not Rosedean the only home I had ever known—the only home I should ever love? I ran and hid myself among the cobwebs in the garret, while my aunts were preparing tea; and there, with my head buried among a heap of old lumber, cried, wept, and sobbed till I was sick and sore. Home! what did I care for home? what did I know of home? I knew indeed that I had two little sisters and a baby brother, for I had paid periodical visits to my parents. I knew also that I had a sickly mother; indeed, I rather exaggerated this point, the truth being that the visits to Dunearn that most impressed me were those which took place after the advent of each

successive baby, when, of course, I always found my mother weak and confined to bed. When I thought of her, therefore, which I confess was not often, I pictured her to myself as a pale, young woman lying in bed surrounded with snowy linen, with great grey eyes deeply under-shaded, gazing sadly, softly, and wistfully on the infant by her side. These infants, each in its turn, I had looked wonderingly at, had kissed in obedience to a command, but had felt less real interest in them than in one of my newly hatched chickens. And I was going to be taken home, and leave my aunts, and Uncle Charlie (whom I was going to marry by and by), and all my pets, and Vulcan! The remembrance of him fairly overcame me, and in bitterness of heart I cried out, "Oh, Vulcan! Vulcan, dear old dog!" Scarcely had I uttered the words ere the faithful creature was at my side, evidently knowing that something was wrong. I flung my arms round his shaggy neck, and wept more than ever, while the poor dog evinced his sympathy by licking the tears from my face, and looking at me pitifully and wistfully with his soft, earnest eyes.

Weeping with my arms round Vulcan's neck, Aunt Mary found me. Gently taking my hand, she led me passively down stairs, my poor companion following with slow pace, and tail between his legs.

On entering the parlour, my father came forward, took me in his arms and kissed me. But

there was no return to his caresses on my part. I remained passive with my face hid on his shoulder. He seemed vexed, and set me down again, saying, "An' so, Cissy, ye winna look at your own father! My wee bit lassie, dinna ye ken that naebody in the world can love you like me, except perhaps your mother?"

I shook my curly head; "Uncle Charlie loves me, and Aunt Margaret loves me, and Aunt Mary loves me, and Vulcan (here the dog left the corner and licked my hands). Everybody loves me better than you." And as I spoke I kept retreating slowly till I took refuge beside Aunt Mary, who happened to be farthest removed from my formidable father.

"I think," said Uncle Charlie, "you'd better not say any more to her just now, Thomas; Cissy will be a good girl, and love her father by and by."

But my father's temper was rising, and he said, somewhat crossly, "To be sure she must love her father; the idea o' a bairn no' likin' its father!"

We sat down round the tea-table, I still keeping as far removed as possible from my father. I did not eat much, however; my heart was too full for that; and not even the cake and currant jelly, for which I had a childish fondness, and which, produced only in honour of strangers, was looked upon as a great treat, could I be induced to touch. But I listened eagerly to every word that passed, anxious to know as much as possible about this sad home-going.

It seemed I was about to be sent to school. My

interest was aroused at this; school was quite a favourite idea of mine. I had often watched the children going to and coming from the village school near, and longed to be one of them. This, of course, was out of the question, but school was nevertheless a favourite topic of conversation with me, and there was no end of thinking and talking about the wonderful things I should do there.

"Yes," my father was saying, "her mother and I have been speakin' about it for a twelvemonth now; indeed, I'm fear'd we've put off too long. Cissy's gettin' a big lassie now."

"But she's not old, Thomas," remonstrated Aunt Mary; "I think you might leave her with us another six months."

"Not a night, Mary, my woman," was the answer; "the longer she stays, the waur it will be to pairt ye; she's been ower lang already, I think." And my father spoke like a man who had made up his mind.

There was a silence of a few minutes after this remark, and then the subject was changed. The weather, the markets, the crops, were all taken up in succession; but I noticed, while my father talked gaily and cheerfully on every subject, that my aunts and uncle said little, and did not seem to take the same eager interest in the news from Dunearn as usual.

While he thus talked, I took every opportunity, when I fancied myself unobserved, of looking at

him; and, child though I was, I soon formed a pretty correct impression of his character.

My father, at the time of which I write, was not more than thirty years of age. He was about the middle height, with an open, honest face, and well-formed features. He had a small well-shaped head, adorned with black, short, curling hair; and I particularly remember being struck with the beauty of his white ear. As to form and features, he was much better looking than my paragon Uncle Charlie, and would have been positively handsome but for a certain lack of refinement in his expression—a refinement which, though recognised at once, is one of those subtle things which cannot be described. In fact, he had none of those advantages from which such refinement could have been expected to spring, and I would not have referred to it here were it not that, child though I was, *this* was what I missed in his face. Uncle Charlie had it; his plain, almost heavy features wore it as a veil of light. But his up-bringing had been different from my father's; though now a farmer, he had been trained to the bar—had consequently had a good education, and had seen men and manners. My father's education, on the contrary, had been limited to three or four sessions of six months each at a parish school; and his attainments to being able to spell through the book of Proverbs, and write, in a good round hand, his own name. Moreover, Uncle Charlie

had good blood in his veins: his mother was a *lady born*, and there was some tradition in the family about her being able to trace her descent from the royal family of Scotland. She had been a proud woman my grandmother, and her family had always held their heads a little higher than their neighbours. Perhaps this pride was their besetting sin. But my father had nothing of this kind of which to boast. If he knew his grandfather, that was all. The son of a cottar, and one of a large family, he was early sent to hold the plough; and a ploughman he would have continued all his life had he not been prudent, frugal, and ambitious. He carefully saved every penny he could from his wages, and at the age of twenty was able to enter business on his own account—in a very small way, of course. But he held on his way successfully; and when, some years after, he married my mother, a daughter of Mrs Howe's of Rosedean, he took a large step upwards in the social scale.

My father was, then, at this time a self-made, or rather, if I may be permitted to use the expression, a *self-making* man, and on the fair way to realise a competency if not a fortune.

I have thought it necessary to make these statements here, although I need scarcely say, that it was many years after I left Rosedean before I knew or understood them.

To return, then, from my digression. The favourable impression which the study of my

father's face was producing on me was suddenly brought to a climax by his looking in my direction when I was engaged in the scrutiny; and by his giving me an encouraging nod and a smile, such a bright, kind, loving smile, that my heart completely thawed under it, and, I have no doubt it was natural instinct, my bosom swelled with a love to which I had hitherto been a stranger. Child of impulse ever, I slipped from my chair and was at my father's side almost before any one perceived my movement. I put my hand in his, and in a moment was pressed to his heart, while such expressions as, "My ain Cissy; my wee bit bonny lassie," flowed from his lips. Words were feeble to express the feeling, new-found in the one case, freshly developed in the other, which had sprung up between father and child. Perhaps my father expressed what he felt better than any one else could have done it when he said, still caressing me, "My ain lassie, I hae nae been sae happy since the first night I held ye in my arms."

I sat on my father's knee then contented and pleased till it was time to prepare to go, while Vulcan, delighted with what seemed such a satisfactory arrangement, stood beside us wagging his tail.

But the wrench came at last. The sound of wheels was heard, the servant brought the gig to the door; a rapid, agonised glance passed between my aunts; another, full of meaning, was cast at

me. My father put me gently on the ground, saying, "Noo, my lassie, get yersel' ready." And with my little brain all in a whirl, I took Aunt Mary's held-out hand and was bonneted, cloaked, and wrapped up, without scarcely knowing. Uncle Charlie lifted me into the gig, tucked the wrapper carefully round me, and drew back beside his sisters. My father shook the reins, the horse started, and giving a long farewell look to the sad faces behind, with a cold, stony feeling about my heart I bade adieu to Rosedean.

CHAPTER III.

Baby Charlie.

THE short half hour soon passed, and ere I was aware, my childish fancy was pleased by seeing the lights of Dunearn shining in the distance, and by hearing the first surging murmurs of city life. A few minutes more and I was in the arms of my mother!

She did not speak; but those great grey eyes, of which I retained so correct an impression, filled with unbidden tears, and said more in their yearning fondness than ten thousand words could have done. From that moment a tie was formed between us which every succeeding year rendered stronger and more tender, and which was only severed by death itself.

She led me into the parlour, set me on the sofa, and removed with gentle hand my numerous wraps. While she did so, I allowed my eyes to linger on her mournfully loving face, till I was fascinated beyond expression with the winning sweetness of

its character. And yet my mother had no claim to beauty. Her eyes were fine, it is true, and her rich brown hair magnificent; but with these exceptions her features were plain and her complexion sallow. From that night, however, she appeared in my eyes, as she ever did in the eyes of those who knew and appreciated her, one of the most lovely and loveable of women.

But it was her character that gave the charm to her face,—a character which in this care-worn, sin-laden world is rarely met with,—a character so simple, so guileless in its simplicity of aim and purpose, so transparent in its every thought and action, that it seemed made to reflect that glorious, pure, and holy Light, which from her earliest days had been the guide of her steps and the lamp of her path. Younger than my aunts, indeed the youngest of my grandmother's large family, and not possessed of robust health, my mother had never been called to engage in the more active duties in which her elder sisters were constantly employed; but the time which minds of a different stamp would have thought tedious and dull, never hung heavy on her hands. The solitary stillness of the old farm house suited the poetical dreaminess of her nature. Knitting in hand she would bury herself in the recesses of an ancient wood, and in the wondrous beauty of ever-changing nature, would catch some glimpses of its all glorious Creator; gazing up into the blue sky

she would almost realise *her* ideal world—the land where the Lamb sits in the midst of the throne; the city with the golden streets and gates of pearl. And realising she would revel in the glories of the unseen till her sanctified imagination could hear the anthems swell and re-vibrate through the celestial courts, and till with a voice that trembled with a sense of her own unworthiness she could take up the chorus, "Worthy is the Lamb, for he was slain for *me*." And returning to the stillness of her own chamber, she would write verses full of the love and fervour which filled her heart—verses, however, whatever their merits, which were sacredly concealed from other eyes in the most hidden recesses of her desk.

Such was my mother as a girl; such was my mother as a wife. Indeed, she was little more than a girl when she married my father, Thomas Raye, who loved her with a passionate fondness. And this love, notwithstanding the singular diversity existing between them in character and disposition, was most faithfully returned and cherished during the whole course of their wedded life.

"And this is my mother," I thought to myself, as with a clinging fondness I had never felt before I nestled close to her on the sofa, watching the loving face,—listening to the soft low accents,—admiring almost unconsciously the graceful folds of the Cashmere dress as they fell round her lithe and almost girlish figure. My mother! And yet

I had been content, nay happy, to live at a distance from her. I felt as if I had committed a great offence, and as if I ought to ask her pardon. But how to do it. Still it must be done, otherwise I could not rejoice in my new found love. "Mother," I commenced timidly (how sweet the word seemed as it trembled on my lips), "Mother, you won't be angry if I tell you something?" "Angry with you, my little Cecile!" and the sweet face looked, if possible, sweeter than before. "Angry!" no, my mother would not—could not be angry. I was convinced of that; indeed, I felt as if I was forgiven already. And yet how could she forgive an unknown fault. One effort more I must make, and said with downcast head, "But—mother—I've been so naughty; I did'nt—did'nt—love—you. Oh, mother!" I could say no more. Nor did I need. My weeping face was drawn very close to my mother's; my tears were wiped or rather kissed away; my curls were gently and softly smoothed back from my face, and the whispered assurance, "But you love me now, Cecile?" was responded to by passionate impetuous kisses.

My father, who had been an interested spectator of this scene, drew his hand across his eyes and said, "It was our ain blame. How could we leave our bit lassie sae lang awa frae us? But it's a' richt now Cissy, my lassie; gie me a kiss too, for I maun awa to write letters an' see to my shop, for it's the shop, ye see, though you're not auld

enough to ken, that gets bread for your mother and the bairns."

After he went out, my mother and I sat hand clasped in hand for upwards of an hour talking about Rosedean; and ere it was time to go to bed I had become quite confidential, and had told her about Vulcan, and the dean, and the chickens, and how sorry I was to leave them all. And I even ventured to ask, "If I would ever be allowed to go back to Rosedean?" hastening to explain that it was only for a day of course, and I did not wish to leave her or my father, but that I would like to see my aunts and Uncle Charlie again, to which my mother replied, "that it was quite right and proper that I should love them, and that all my holidays would be spent there." What were holidays I wondered, and by and by I asked. And so from one thing to another, till my mother rose, and going to the side-board, brought out a plate of nice sweet biscuits, and told me to take some. But tempting as they appeared to my childish taste, I absolutely declined. To eat on such a night as this was impossible.

"What, not one?" asked my mother.

I shook my head. "Then I shall show you my pets," she continued, and taking my hand she led me into her bed-room, while I wondered what sort of pets she was going to shew me. My curiosity was soon satisfied.

The house being small, my mother's room was

more a nursery than anything else. In a cot slept my two little sisters, Aggie and Susie. Wee chubby Susie's head was very comfortably pillowed on the breast, and her fat round arm laid across the mouth of her elder sister. My mother smiled, and lifted me up to look at them ere she altered the arrangement. Then gently she lifted the little head upon the pillow again; put the dimpled arm in its proper place; hung over the sleepers for a moment, while her lips moved in silent prayer; and then turning to a cradle at the side of her bed she drew aside a gauze screen and displayed to my delighted gaze a sleeping cherub—my little brother—my baby Charlie! Years cannot efface from my memory the picture of infant beauty as I saw it then for the first time. In the holy sleep of infancy, with a serene, almost solemn expression resting upon his baby face; with the long shady eyelashes reposing on the marble cheeks; with the rosebud of a mouth not yet defiled by the language of earth; he seemed to my excited fancy a visitant from that bright world which I had been told was peopled by such fair beings. I fell upon my knees beside the cradle, and with open mouth and clasped hands gazed my full of rapture.

"Kiss him," whispered my mother. All trembling I obeyed, and placed my lips, almost reverentially, on the velvet cheek. A smile wreathed the corner of the little mouth—a smile of holy inno-

cence which is never seen save on the faces of slumbering babes. By the side of that cradle I could have remained all night—wondering, *worshipping*. For my heart's allegiance was already given, my heart's idol was being enthroned. But my mother gently replaced the screen, gently drew me to her bosom, and kissing me said, "Now Cecile, it is time to go to bed, you will see your little brother again to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" I could not help saying, "Oh, I wish it were to-morrow!"

My mother smiled, "Well, it will soon be here." She then opened a door, and shewing me a small chamber, told me it was mine. She next helped me to undress, after which I knelt down and said my prayers, for the first time, at a mother's knee. How very full my heart was as I prayed for my sisters and little brother that night! How well I remember every emotion that passed through my heart! At last, however, I got into bed, and was tucked in by my mother; she bade me good night, commended me to the care of the Good Shepherd, and left me. A few minutes more, and the sound sleep of healthy childhood closed this, to me, long and exciting day.

CHAPTER IV.

The Angel and the Flowers.

THE purpose for which I had been brought home to Dunearn was speedily carried out. I was sent to school, and there I continued, without break or interruption, save the regular holidays and vacations, for many years. My parents, as most conscientious parents do, made a regular business of my education. I was sent to the best schools, and had the best masters that my native town could produce; moreover, my studies were carefully superintended at home. With such advantages I made, as may naturally be supposed, rapid progress. Indeed, my fondness for school and work was so great that the childish and wholesome love of play was often sacrificed to it; and in consequence my figure lost its plumpness and my cheek its bloom ere I had been many years in Dunearn.

But it is not my intention here to linger over

school and school scenes. It is enough to say that I learned everything which girls generally learn, and some things which boys learn into the bargain; that I worked samplers, solved problems, played the piano, painted in oil and water colours, was familiar with the finest selections from Scott, Shakespeare, and Milton, and before my education was completed (I speak in the conventional sense) I knew a little Latin, a good deal of Italian, and a great deal of French. During all the years I spent at school I was a model rather than a merry school girl. The imagination and the somewhat dreamy thoughtfulness which I inherited from my mother prevented me from entering into, or sympathising with, the light-hearted mirth, the innocent gaiety, or the mischievous romping of my playful companions. I was, therefore, by no means popular. If I found myself in the midst of a game, or one of a group, it was more by accident than by any preconceived arrangement. I stood alone in a state of isolated grandeur, the dux of all my classes, and the pet, it was said, of all my teachers. Had it not been, therefore, that my heart and its affections were centred in home, I might have been miserable; as it was, I contented myself with not being disliked, and was always pleased when I had an opportunity (and I had many) of assisting a companion in any case of difficulty, such as working out a sum that *would not* come right, or explaining a French idiom which seemed made to puzzle a little head.

So much for school life. But home life, how different! In the one the head was cultivated, in the other the heart. Cultivated—let me use a better word, and say disciplined—for severe, very severe, was the discipline through which my young heart was called to pass. I have said I was thoughtful, thoughtful beyond my years; and for this there was good reason. Reader, I was early made familiar with the grim rider on the pale horse—with *Death*, which sometimes seems to me the only reality in the midst of life's many desert-begotten mirages.

Why is it that the one loved object is often so rudely torn from us? Why that so many have felt what the weeping Hinda sang, that the best, the loveliest, the dearest, are always "the first to fade away?" Why? We know not now, but we shall know hereafter.

During the first winter after my return home, it would have been difficult to have found a happier child. Up before the red sun had penetrated his misty mantle; my cheeks all aglow from the effects of the cold water which my mother had not spared; my steaming porridge eaten with a relish which none but children know; with a "Good bye, Aggie; good bye, Susan," and half a dozen kisses left as a legacy on baby Charlie's velvet cheeks, I was off to school full ten minutes before the hour. No laggard crawling pace was mine; but daintily I picked my way through November slush and

December snows, well pleased with my warm scarlet cloak, my beaver hat, and nice thick boots, and well pleased (shall I confess so much?) by hearing occasionally complimentary remarks and comparisons between myself and the famous "Little Red Riding Hood," although the only likeness, I daresay, lay in my warm scarlet cloak.

School reached and work begun, I was conscious all the time of a strange species of enjoyment, a warm, nestling, fluttering happiness in my heart, which, altogether independent of the employment of the hour, or the objects by which I was surrounded, nevertheless shed a glow on everything, and made the most difficult task easy. The cause of this wondrous happiness I did not know then; indeed, not till I had lost it, not till the little nestling dove had raised its wings and taken its flight to its own blessed land of light and love.

Lessons over and school-work done, I sped homewards on the wings of love. No lingering now, as sometimes happened in the morning, to try to break the ice with my thick heeled boots, and mark with delight the glittering fragments as they lay shivered around me; no dipping the toe jauntily into little pools of water, and watching the tiny ripples breaking over the miniature lake, or plunging my foot up to the ankle in a tempting heap of soft fleecy snow. No, home, home! the fluttering increasing till my heart throbbed with its own happiness, and baby Charlie's dimpled arms were

once more held out to me, and my lips once more pressed to his downy cheeks!

Has earth a pleasure as unmixed with pain as this?

By and by winter passed and spring came; not announced by snowdrops and welcomed by daisies as at Rosedean, but making itself known by balmy breezes and lengthening days.

Dunearn, though built in utter defiance of all the rules of health, was nevertheless a beautifully situated town. A noble river swept through the valley where it stood, and sentinel mountains kept watch around it. Two fine parks covered with rich greensward lay at the north and south sides of the town along the banks of this smoothly flowing river; while paths, roads, and rural lanes, diverged from the town in every direction. The inhabitants, therefore, were at no loss for pure sweet air, one of heaven's best gifts, however much man may ignore it, and with spring many a pale-cheeked damsel and sickly-looking artizan might be seen issuing from the lanes and closes to enjoy the gentle breeze which, however balmy, still bore on its health-laden wings a pleasant freshness from the heathery Grampians.

Nor were we slow to take advantage of the lengthening days and the genial season. During the winter my open air exercise had been confined to my daily walks to and from school; but now, under the care and protection of Annie, our much

loved and faithful servant, who did double work in the morning in order that she might have the *pleasure* of taking us out in the afternoon, every hour we could spare was spent out of doors.

Dear, kind Annie! let me here pay a tribute to her memory. My mother's *first* servant, she for many years served her faithfully and well, identifying herself with all the interests of her mistress and children, tending them in sickness, rejoicing in their happiness, weeping with their sorrow. For seven long years she lived in our house beloved and respected; then marrying one in every respect worthy of her she became a happy and honoured wife. How is it that such relations are now almost impossible between "mistress and maid"?

One lovely afternoon, about the end of April, when Annie was seated on a sunny bank on which the wild thyme was just beginning to blow, weaving a garland for the baby's hat of the buttercups and daisies which Susan, Aggie, and I were bringing her in lapfuls, a lady approached and accosted us. She asked us our names and our ages, and said one or two pleasant things to us in the pretty way that elderly ladies generally speak to children; then bending over the baby, while her face assumed an expression of peculiar interest, she said, "What a beautiful child! Ah, I fear he is too beautiful to live!" And with those words she departed. A shade passed over Annie's happy face, as hugging the baby to her breast she cried, "No, no, my

bairnie, my darling, I winna believe her; the Lord is far owre gude to break yer mither's heart and mine by takin' ye t' Himsel'; an' yet, an' yet I dinna a'thegither like the look aboot yer e'en, my bonnie doo, an' things that hae happened ance may happen again."

I was but a child then, and yet I can remember the gloomy shadow that fell upon my spirit, and the strange shivering sensation that seized my body as Annie spoke. Children are all, more or less, superstitious. May this not spring, however, from other causes than mere childish weakness? May it not arise from their closer connection with and affinity to the spiritual world, the mysterious Unseen which surrounds us on every side? Some, we know, of delicate organization have carried this superstitious sensitiveness, this childishness if you will, through a long life with them. But to return, I made an effort to overcome my groundless fear.

"What things, Annie?" I asked, as I crept close to her side. I had heard the lady's remark about Charlie; *my* flower-gathering was over for this afternoon.

"What things, Cecile? Dinna ye ken that the Lord often sends His angel to tak' wee bit rosebuds, like Charlie, to heaven, that they may blossom an' bloom in His own bright home above." And Annie burst into tears.

I flung my arms round her neck and whispered,

"O Annie, don't, don't; see you are frightening the baby."

"I daresay I am, puir lamb, but I canna help it, and I ken it's wrang tae," continued the good creature speaking through tears that would not be repressed, "for I should rather be glad to think that he wud be ta'en awa frae a wicked warld to ane where there's neither sin nor sorrow. But I canna help it, I canna help it; I suppose it's human nature."

The blood was running cold about my heart, and a strange awe was creeping over my spirit. What could all this portend? Was this speck in my horizon to prove the cloud, not bigger than a man's hand, which was to deluge my happiness and destroy my fairest flower? I looked at baby Charlie. There he half lay in Annie's lap, bright and smiling, plucking out daisies and buttercups from the half-finished wreath with his chubby fingers, the very picture of beauty and health; certainly there was nothing gloomy about him. I raised my eyes and looked around me. The sun was westering, but still far from his golden couch, and from the eminence where we sat we could see the town, the river, and the fertile strath bathed in his yellow light, lying at our feet; in the park beside us the lambs, tired with feeding, were gambolling round their mothers; birds were twittering in the still half-clad trees, e'er they roosted for the night; hedgerows were budding, leaves were

bursting, all nature was full of vitality and sweet spring life; certainly there was no gloom around me. I mustered courage, and whispered in Annie's ear, as if afraid of hearing my own voice, "What is death? Have you ever seen any body die?"

"That I have, Cecile, my lassie, an' I'm no very auld yet, but it would tak' the minister or somebody far wiser than me to tell you what it is."

"Was everybody that you saw die beautiful like—like Charlie?" I asked again.

"Oh, no, Cecile! there was my grandmother, and then my grandfather, and they were old folks ye ken; an' then there was my cousin, he was a fine strappin' chield like, but he couldna be called beautiful; but then there was my little sister, an' she was,"—here Annie's tears flowed afresh,—"an' she was a bonny wee thing, she was the bonniest o' us a'; an' I've never been like mysel' since she de'ed. But what am I thinkin' o'? its time we were a' hame; your mother 'll think we're lost." And starting to her feet, she put on baby's hat, and calling on Agnes and Susan, who were still gowan pulling, she set out in a homeward direction.

I would fain have asked her more questions, but there was something in her manner that repelled me; and I walked on a few steps behind her brooding gloomily over the new idea which the incident of the afternoon had suggested. For a new idea it was to me. I had, of course, a vague knowledge

of death; I had heard of people dying; I had stood almost every Sunday with my aunts beside the grassy mound in the ivy-walled churchyard of the little village near Rosedean where my grandmother and her youngest daughter slept; I had heard the simple inscription read; I had traced the letters "K-a-t-h-e-r-i-n-e," the name of my little aunt, upon the grey moss-grown stone; I knew that she was six years old, and that she had been wept over by those she had left behind. But, beyond this, I realised nothing more. I never thought of her as dead. To me she was a spirit-child who haunted the old farm-house, and who, in my hours of solitary play, often seemed to me to be alive. My aunts often talked to me about her, and, indeed, I never wearied hearing of the pretty fair-haired child, who wandered about among grown-up brothers and sisters with her only playmate—a pet lamb—by her side, and her never-failing companion—a Testament—under her arm; nor of hearing her favourite chapter in the Revelations read; nor of being told how, when she died, her pet lamb followed her little coffin, with mournful bleatings, to the churchyard gate. And she was dead and buried! And yet I had no dread when I thought of her. I knew she was in heaven, singing the praises of the good Shepherd who had gathered her to his bosom. During my walk home, all these facts arose in my mind, and I made a great effort to shake off the unnatural gloom which over-

powered me, but my effort was unavailing, it would *not* be shaken off.

After we children had taken tea, I sat down to prepare my lessons as usual, but it was simply a waste of time, my mind was pre-occupied; at every sound I started up; and at last, collecting my books, I laid them aside in despair, and went into the room where my mother and Annie were putting the younger children to bed. I watched little, laughing, crowing Charlie put in his bath; stood close at hand to hold the towel and little night-gown; and kissing him again and again, saw him laid in his little cot, my mother allowing me to tuck the bedclothes round him. Then I laid my head close to his, and prayed as I never prayed before, "That holy angels might guard his bed;" at least these were the words I used, but it seemed that my heart went up to God and that *He* understood much that I felt and which was not uttered. Tears filled my eyes, but I felt comforted, and turning my head aside I wiped them away, unseen by my mother, who, addressing me in a cheerful voice, said, "Cecile, you had better go and finish your lessons now; I am afraid you'll be late to-night."

But I did not feel inclined, or, indeed, able for work that night, so pleading the excuse of head-ache, which was indeed true, I asked permission to go to bed.

She looked at me somewhat anxiously, but was evidently re-assured, for she smiled and said,

"It's not often you're in such a hurry, but if you wish you may go; you can easily rise an hour earlier in the morning to your lessons."

That night, perhaps it was nothing more than might have been expected, I had a singular dream. I fancied I stood by the grave in the village churchyard near Rosedean, just as I used to stand with my aunts, but that I was alone. The sun was shining, and its rays seemed to fall direct on the grave, the green sward of which seemed covered with flowers, fairer far than any I had ever seen before. I stooped to gather them, when all at once I was conscious of a bright child-like figure by my side. I knew her at once and said, "Aunty Katherine, what has brought you here?"

"I have come," she said, in a voice sweeter than ever fell on mortal ear, "to help you to gather flowers." And as she spoke she smiled a smile so bright, so celestial, that I could not describe it though I would.

We went on in happy silence for some time with our flower gathering, till both my hands were filled, then smiling again she said,

"You have plenty now; what are you going to do with them?"

"Give them to Baby Charlie," I said.

"Ah, yes!" and the celestial smile was brighter than ever, "Baby Charlie, it is him I wish to see; you must go and fetch him, he is the flower I wish to gather."

I looked doubtfully at her for an instant, but her smile was so bright and reassuring that I could not hesitate, but sped off on my errand.

By and by I was returning with my darling in my arms; but somehow or other everything was changed. The sun had gone down, and the air was chill, while every step I took the path became more rough, till at last I several times stumbled and nearly fell with my precious burden. Now, too, I feared I had lost my way; for as the night grew darker the country looked strangely wild and dismal. Suddenly my course was checked. A broad and rapid river lay before me. I shivered as I stood and looked at it. Dark and forbidding in its stormy flow, I hesitated to enter. To add to my misery, the baby, my darling baby, began to cry and cling to my neck. Onwards I felt I must go, but how I knew not. Once more the spirit-child stood before me. Her figure seemed taller than when I first saw her: an aureole was round her head, and in the darkness her garments seemed made of light.

"So you have come at last," she seemed to say. "I have been waiting long for you; but I know," she added in a reassuring tone, "you have had a rough road to travel. It is never pleasant to accompany loved ones to the banks of this river. But why tarry you now? the night is far spent. Give me the baby and let me go."

"But it is so cold, I cannot cross this river." And I shivered as I spoke.

"You don't require to cross just yet. In a short time, if you love the Lord, you will be helped over, but not now."

"And Charlie?"

"He won't feel the cold; I shall carry him over." And she held out her arms to my darling.

I hugged him to my breast; no, we should not be separated. I pressed my lips to his little mouth; I prepared to step into the water; but she put me gently aside, and using a little gentle violence, took the infant from my grasp. As she did so, my baby, my Charlie, turned in her arm and gave me a look, such a look, such a smile, bright with the rays of reflected glory, that my eyes were dazzled. When I could look again she had gone into the river with him; but after going a few steps she raised a pair of wings, which I had not noticed before, and rose majestically up towards heaven.

"Charlie! Charlie!" I wailed; "I must go with Charlie!" And rushing forward into the river, the intense cold startled me, and, shivering and moaning, I awoke, and behold it was a dream!

But such a dream! I could not sleep again; and thankful was I when the morning dawned and gave me an excuse for dressing; and long before the others were out of bed I had stolen on tip-toe to the room where my idol slept, and stood by his

little cot, calming my terrors by watching his rosy sleep, and listening to his gentle breathings. My heart was still heavy, however, when my mother said, "Well, Cecile, you have been up betimes; I suppose you have got your lesson well prepared."

"Yes, mamma."

Something in the tone of voice must have attracted my mother's attention, for she looked at me anxiously for a moment or two, and then said, "Cecile, dear, you are not well; I'm afraid you must have some medicine, and go to bed again."

"If you please, mamma, I had rather go to school; I like going."

"Very well, dear, if you feel able for it;" and my mother kissed me as I went to prepare. Oh what a relief if I could have told her my dream; but I felt sure it would pain her, and resolved to confine it to my own bosom.

CHAPTER V.

Learning the Angels' Song.

SPRING bloomed into summer, and our afternoon rambles were prolonged. They led us now through hawthorn-flowered hedges, through golden broom and tangled thickets of wild roses; they led us by the side of mountain-torrents, by winding sheep-paths, through valley and through glen; they led us by the side of fields purpled with clover, and sweet with bean-blossom. Where did they not lead us, a troup of merry-hearted children and a kind-hearted nurse? And then the bunches of flowers we gathered —the white and red briar roses, the purple foxgloves, and the fairy blue-bells! We lived in an atmosphere of happiness; scarce a shadow crossed my path. Baby Charlie was getting a nice strong child, and becoming more beautiful every day. He was weaned now, and the prettiest little white teeth were one by one beginning to peep through his

rosy lips. My dream was about to share the fate of other dreams, and to be forgotten, when—but I must stop; my hand trembles even now.

One day, on returning at the usual hour from school, I found the lobby-door open, and the kitchen, which was next it, clean and orderly as usual, but deserted. Passing straight into the parlour, I saw that dinner was on the table, that it had been there for some time, but that it was comparatively untouched; for, with the exception of my father's plate of soup, which was half empty, and in which the spoon lay, the others were just as they had been served out. Susie was seated at the table on her high chair, improving the occasion by mixing bread in her soup, and then, for a variety, pouring soup over the bread. Aggie stood on a chair at the window, with her doll in her arms and her nose pressed against a pane. All this I saw at a glance, but where were the others? I rushed into the room opposite (my mother's), and found all explained.

She was seated on a low chair with baby on her lap covered with a blanket; a large bath stood at her feet, and beside her stood the doctor, bending forward to watch the face of the suffering child, while he kept his finger on the pulse. On the other side stood my father watching, with all his soul in his face, every change in the face of his babe. Annie was near by with her apron at her eyes; and her choking sobs were the only sounds heard in the room. Another person also was there,

with a sweet pale face and a soft drab dress. I knew her well. It was Mrs Daniel, a dear friend of my mother's; one who had been beside her in every maternal crisis, and who on every occasion of dire distress was immediately sent for.

I understood it all too well, and sick, coldly sick, at heart, I laid down my green baize bag and my hat in a corner, and crept up to the silent group.

It was a question of life and death. One of those sharp sudden ailments which the Lord sometimes sends to bear little children as in a fiery chariot to heaven, had seized our little Charlie. Everything that medical skill could do had been done promptly and quickly; but, alas, with no avail, for even while we watched we could see the fluttering shadows falling on the soft round face. A spasm or two, and then an opening of the eyes, and a bright, bright smile, which made my father exclaim, "See, he smiles; he's gettin' better." But the doctor shook his head; and even I knew better: *it was the light of the reflected glory* which I had seen before. I crept closer. I caught the hand from which the doctor had removed his finger. No, I would not be separated from my darling; but feeble as a grasshopper was my puny will in the presence of *Death*. Another moment, and a loud, a bitter cry from my father, and a passionate burst of weeping from Annie, told that all was over. I only crept closer, however, to my mother's knee, whose trembling limbs could scarce support

the lifeless body, and pressed passionate kisses on the cold, little hand which I still held in mine. Meanwhile the doctor, putting his arm in my father's, led him from the room; and Mrs Daniel approached my mother to remove the body of her little son from her knee. She gave no opposition, but kissing the mouth and brow for the last time, she raised her eyes to heaven, with a look in them I shall never forget, and said in firm tones, but with trembling lips, "Thy will be done!"

"Amen," added Mrs Daniel. "The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be His holy name."

Then my mother caught me in her arms, kissed me passionately, and pressed me to her bosom again and again, calling me Cecile, her darling Cecile; "her poor, poor little girl." She knew what I did not—the grief, the misery, the anguish I was yet to endure. In the mean time I still sat crouching on the floor, stunned and stupefied, following the motions of the others about the room, and seeing all that was done as though I saw it not. My mother sat swaying her body to and fro, as if endeavouring to control her emotion, and her face buried in her hands, while Mrs Daniel removed our little Charlie to his cot, then rising, she moved slowly to her wardrobe, and laying her hand at once on a particular spot, she lifted a carefully wrapped-up parcel, and opening it, placed on the table two beautifully-made night-dresses, a large

and a small one. She gazed wistfully for a moment upon the larger of the two, then replaced it in the parcel, half-ejaculating as she did so, "Not my will, not mine, but *Thine* be done." Then beckoning Annie, she placed in her hands a pair of linen sheets, "clean and white," which had never been used, and saying a few words in a low tone to her, the poor weeping creature left the room to obey her mistress's behest. Next she unfolded the little night-gown, and taking it in her hand, approached the cot where the body of her infant lay. Annie reappeared, and kneeling down with the necessary requisites beside my mother, whose trembling hands were now preparing to perform the last sad offices to her lost little one, said, in agitated tones, "Oh, mem, mem, let me do that for you." But no; Annie was waived aside; and then Mrs Daniel proffered her assistance, but with the same result. No hireling hands however faithful, nor friendly hands however dear, must touch our sainted Charlie. My mother must perform this last labour of love herself—*must*. "None but me has ever dressed my darling, and none but me shall dress him now," she said in a tone composed and gentle, but full of untold misery.

At length, though flesh and heart had almost fainted, she accomplished her self-imposed task, and Annie, who had so often carried the living, loving Charlie, now lifted his scarcely cold clay into the little spare bed-room, laid him down upon

the pure white linen, arranged the top sheet carefully, and then we all stood and gazed at his little face once more. As we did so, Annie turned in horror to Mrs Daniel and said, "Oh, its awfu', the mistress, puir body, has forgotten to close the e'en."

"Never mind, Annie, it's too late now," and Mrs Daniel shook her head.

But my mother said, making a sickly effort to smile, "No, Annie, I did not forget; but I could not bear to think that I should never see those lovely eyes again. Oh I must, I must see them again!" And she stopped overcome with emotion; she made another effort to regain her composure, but in vain; she was led out of the room by Mrs Daniel and Annie, weeping and sobbing, "Oh Charlie! Charlie! would to God I had died instead of thee!"

How the rest of this weary evening was passed I cannot remember; but well do I remember the waking, the miserable waking, of the morrow. Child-like I had slept soundly, but on opening my eyes a sudden remembrance of what had happened flashed across my mind, bringing a dull dead weight of unbearable anguish. I tried to sleep again, but in vain; my eyes were hot, my eyelids stiff, and my mouth and throat parched. Immediately the stillness of the house struck me; there was something awful in it. Was it possible that every one had slept in utter forgetfulness of—

of the little sleeper who till the resurrection morn should know no waking? Was it possible? Then I began to wonder how I could have slept, to accuse myself of hard-heartedness, and to blame myself because I did not weep. Why did I not weep? I had seen tears in the eyes of every one, and I, who used to weep at seeing a little wounded bird, or a poor maimed pussy cat, I was the only one with dry eyes; *I!* did I not love him then? But the question gave my lacerated heart such a pang that I shrieked aloud in anguish.

How I hated the beams of the glorious summer sun that came streaming into my room as usual through the darkened window, the very chirping of the poor sparrows gave me unutterable grief. The stillness of the house still continued, and I lay tossing and feverish till I made myself believe that I heard something stirring in the room where my lost idol lay. A sudden, strange, and unaccountable terror immediately took possession of me. Perhaps he was not dead after all; perhaps, even now he was alive wanting food and nobody knew.

I could rest no longer, and, foolish though it was, the ray of hope cheered me for the moment; I sprung from my bed and stole to the room where Charlie lay. But, to my disappointment, I found the door locked, and I had no help but to stand listening at the door till I convinced myself that all was still, very still, within, that my fancy was

madness, my wild hope a delusion. To go back to my own bed I durst not, so I wandered into the little room off the kitchen where Annie slept. She was still in bed; but when I whispered, "O Annie, are you asleep?" she instantly sprang up and clasped me to her breast, crying, "O Cecile, my puir lassie, what 'll we baith do noo withoot oor bonnie lamb? Oh dear! Oh dear me!" And Annie burst into a fresh passion of tears. There had been no sleep with her, I could see that. Her face was swelled, her eyes red, and her eyelids heavy. I clung to her, and asked, O Annie, may I come in beside you, I'm frightened to stay in my own bed?"

"I daresay you are, my puir lassie; an' nae wonder; come awa'; but I maun rise noo an licht the fire, an' mak' a cup o' tea tae your mither; there's nane but Ane kens what she has to bear, but thanks to His sovereign grace He will support her." And Annie, rising as she spoke, laid me down in her place, and tucked the clothes round me, for, summer though it was, I was shivering all over. "Try an' sleep noo, my bairn, it'll do ye good," she said. I did not oppose her, although I felt sure that nothing in the world would ever do me good again, but lay watching her through the open door, and wondering why everybody could weep but me.

In an hour or two some faint attempts were made to fall into the regular routine of the day.

We all rose and dressed, and, with the exception of my mother, assembled as usual for morning prayers. This morning my father changed his ordinary course, and read instead a portion from Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. The passage he selected is familiar to most of us, and as he read the apostle's magnificent peroration and came to the words, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" his voice, which had been trembling for some time, fairly broke down, and the strong man bowed his head upon the table and sobbed like a child.

There was something awfully appalling in my father's grief. Aggie and Susie wept with terror; Annie's sympathetic tears ran in torrents; even the two shopmen seemed overcome; but I, little hard-hearted Cecile, "let not one tear-drop fall." Oh why did I not weep?

Scarcely had we finished our pretence of breakfasting before Uncle Charlie and my two Aunts from Rosedean arrived. They pressed my father's hand in silence, then asked for my mother, and scarcely noticing me passed into her room. I hung about the door for some time, heard them talking and sobbing. In a little they came out accompanied by my mother. I drew myself back out of her sight; somehow I could not bear to look at her; but I saw she had a key in her hand, and I saw them move to the door of the spare chamber. Ah, the temptation was irresistible now! I crept

close up to my aunts, and entered with them into the chamber of death. I saw the little face uncovered once more; but I scarcely took time to glance at it, for a sudden idea flashed through my brain, and quick as the thought was it accomplished. I knew I had entered unnoticed, and, if I could only hide now, I would be locked in with my own baby Charlie. A feeling almost of delight took possession of me, as I stole under the bed, at the prospect before me. I scarcely dared to breathe till they left the room and I heard the key turn behind them. Then, oh then, my heart beat tumultuously, and I hastened from my hiding-place. To place myself on a level with the body by means of a chair—to fold down carefully the top covering till I could see the face and the beautiful little hands crossed so gently on the breast—was the work of a few minutes; but to kiss the clay-cold brow, the blue blue lips, and the stiff little hands, was the work of hours. Charlie was so beautiful in death,—most children are,—and when I looked at the serene expression, which I remember seeing on his face the first time I beheld him, the words my father had read that morning arose in my memory: "O death, where is thy sting?" and I kept repeating them over till something of their real meaning entered my mind. Then also, as the hours went by, verses which I had learned from Auntie Katherine's favourite chapter in Revelations came also to my mind, bright as if

printed in letters of gold and bringing such meaning with them.

"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light upon them, nor any heat.

"For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Beautiful words—precious promises. As I thought on them, the fountains of my heart began to open, and my dry eyes to become moist.

Don't misunderstand me. I don't pretend to say that I, a child of some seven years, could explain as I have done here, the feelings of her mind; but certain it is that the effect was produced by some such process as I have here attempted to define. And why should not the words—the grand old words—of His book not influence a childish mind as well as one of riper years, when we are told, "that out of the mouths of babes and sucklings He hath perfected praise"?

Several times during that never forgotten day had I rapidly to retreat to my hiding-place. Many sympathising friends came to mourn with my mother over her lost darling, and, as the custom was, they invariably came to take a last long look at the little pale face before they departed. During all these visits, I lay coiled up under the bed, dreading discovery, wondering I had not been

missed, and expecting every instant to hear my name called. But I need not have been afraid; every mind was too much pre-occupied, every heart too much overawed, to notice my absence. As soon as they left the chamber and locked the door, once more I was in my old place, and at my old work again. Oh dear, how miserably happy I was in my sad, sad watching; to tell all I thought and felt would fill a volume!

As the day drew to a close, I heard my father and a gruff-voiced stranger enter. I soon learned that this was a business matter, for the man spoke in an off-hand kind of way about "coffins, and styles, and trimmings." Oh, how my heart throbbed, and the blood rushed tumultuously through my body. How could my father stand and hear him speak that way? And then there was some talk as to the "fastening down." I almost shrieked in my agony. At last they were gone, but the door was not locked, and in a minute or two my mother entered alone. She bolted the door in the inside after she came in. She stood for some time in silence, then I heard repressed sobs, and at last an agony of weeping. I could bear it no longer; I crept from my place of concealment and stood by her side. The weeping continued. I caught her hand. She started and looked at me with a kind of terror. "Cecile, child! how came you here? where have you been?" I pointed to my hiding-place in silence.

"And how long have you been here, my poor little girl—since morning?"

"Yes, mamma." It was well I had not to say more, for I could not.

"And you have been looking?"—she pointed to the pale little figure.

My lips quivered; and I felt my face contracted by a sudden spasm.

"My own—my poor—poor Cecile!" She caught me in her arms, and pressed me to her bosom. Mother and child wept together. Yes, thank God, I wept at last, long, long; I know not how long my mother and I wept and lingered in that small chamber. I only know that the long summer day waned—that the twilight deepened—the shadows fell, and still we were there; and it was not till the darkness gloomed, that my mother led me forth, pale and weird-like, from that chamber of death.

Why describe the next day when the solemn stillness which begins to soothe the bleeding heart is broken in upon by the harassing arrangements which precede the funeral. I have sometimes wondered whether all this fuss, this arrival of black dresses, black coats, crapes and caps, is necessary; or if it is simply a device of the Evil One, to prevent the survivors from thinking of their own latter end. Or the next, when the stately hearse and mourning carriage convey with funeral pomp our loved one to the grave; when

friends come and go; and when the family group shiver and crouch together, reading their anguish on each other's faces, and not daring to speak of the blank which all perceive. Or the next, and the next, and the next,—when the father goes to his business, and comes in to every meal looking more miserable and woe-begone than at first; when the mother crawls listlessly about her household duties, takes up her knitting, and drops and loses more stitches with her trembling hands and tear-blinded eyes than she takes up! Ah, we have all, all known something of those days of bitterness, and nights of sleepless sighing!

Sunday came at last, and after service we all went to see Charlie's grave. There was not much to see,—a little mound of newly turfed ground! And yet we stood and looked, and stood and wept, while Aggie—poor stupid little Aggie—insisted on her mamma shewing her baby—her own baby Charlie, and would not be convinced that he was "down there." Oh dear, how sick, sick, my heart was—how bewildered I was with the world and everything in it—sunny blue skies, singing birds, fresh green grass, luxuriant foliage, and death in the midst of all—what a mockery!

That night my mother once more summoned courage to call her children round her, and to talk to them in such a beautifully simple way about little Charlie, and about the heaven to which he had gone, that even Susie understood something of

it; and to me it seemed very near, a place in which I had a special interest. And though we wept when we thought of our baby Charlie learning "The Angels' Song," the tears were more tears of joy than of sorrow!

On the Monday morning I went back to school with a scared-looking pale face and a black dress. I worked little Charlie's initials in my sampler in black silk, and under it the words,

"Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

To my teachers, to my aunts I seemed the same child; I question if even my mother guessed at the strange unearthliness of my young heart; but Annie, simple unsophisticated Annie, seemed to understand it, for she would often look at me in a peculiar way and say, "Cecile, Cecile, my bairn, I wish ye were more like ither bairns, an' nae sae douce like." And then she would kiss me, and when she fancied herself unseen would lift her apron and wipe her eyes.

In the following year Aggie was sent to school; she had been a delicate child from her infancy, and a constant source of anxiety to her mother. On the morning she was to go, my mother took her little thin hand, placed it in mine, and said, "I know, Cecile, you will take care of her." My mother was right; from that moment Aggie was my particular charge; indeed, my affection for her was something more than sisterly. She alone of

the family ever reminded me of the lost Charlie; the same solemnly serene expression sometimes shone in her large hazel eyes, and the same transparency of skin was marked in the same way by branching blue veins about the temples, across the top of the nose, and round the sweet little mouth. All the love not buried in Charlie's grave was centred on her, and sometimes I shuddered as my heart *would* put the question, "Will she die too?"

As the years rolled on, we three sisters grew up into womanhood, like and yet unlike in character, feelings, and appearance: Susie fair, fat, and plump as when I first saw her; Aggie, as I have described, with delicate form and features, and her mother's eyes and hair; and I, a tall, thin, pale thing, with purple blue eyes, and waving masses of hair of that golden hue which the old masters loved to paint.

CHAPTER VI.

A Never-to-be-forgotten Day.

THE third of July 18— was a gala day in our household; indeed, for that matter the preceding day had been one too, for on it "The Bride of the Ocean," a fine new barque belonging to my father, had been launched. It was the largest vessel ever built at the port of Dunearn, and in honour of the occasion and in honour of my father, he was invited to a large public dinner by all the influential merchants of the town and farmers of the county; publicly congratulated on his spirit of enterprise, and publicly presented with a handsome piece of plate. His star was in the ascendant, he was prosperous, fawned on, followed. Perhaps never man deserved such a testimonial better than my father; he was hard-working, kind, and liberal; but, moreover, he had been *successful*, this was the grand secret of the testimonial. He was a lucky man, and the

lucky man is the man the world delights to honour.

All belonging to him gave marks of his improved circumstances, of his wealth if you will. His shop, a year or two before the date of this chapter, had been changed into an office, his small "flat" to an aristocratic looking house in a terrace fronting one of the parks; he had servants, a phaeton, a riding horse, and pony. But though all his outward belongings were thus changed, there was no change in himself. He was still the plain, humble, kind-hearted man, retaining the language of his country, hating with a sturdy hatred anything belonging to coxcombery or vanity, having no desire to mingle in what might be called the fashionable world of Dunearn, but on the contrary, preferring the society of those who had formerly been his equals, thinking no spot in the world fit to be compared to his own fireside, and, perhaps to a fault, proud of and indulgent to his family.

The plan of pleasure to which I have referred was of his devising. The "Bride of the Ocean" was to make her trial trip to-day, and we were all, even to the nurse and the two little boys which my mother had given us during the last four years, to go on board, sail down the river with her, and return in the evening. It was a nice idea, and each of us anticipated pleasure from it.

The household was early astir on that sunny summer morning, and preparations for the day

made at once. I was in a little room which I called my studio, anxiously endeavouring to give the finishing touches to some moss rose-buds which I was copying from nature, when Aggie entered.

"Oh! come, Cecile," she said, "you are not ready, and the phaeton has been at the door for more than half an hour."

"I won't be a minute, Aggie." And I touched away more industriously than ever.

She watched me patiently for a minute or two, then she began to beat the floor impatiently with her little foot, and at last she exclaimed, "There's mamma's step; she is ready. Come, Cecile, come!"

There was no help for it. At that precise minute I would have given up my expected share in the day's pleasure to have been allowed to finish my roses; they looked so fresh, so sweet, so inviting, and they might be withered before night! I almost sighed, as, looking at them wistfully, I put them carefully in water.

"I declare, Cecile, I never saw the like of you," said Aggie, as putting her arm in mine, she pulled me out of the room; "just think now, you would not have cared though we had all lost a sail on that beautiful river" (pointing through the open hall door to it gleaming like silver among the trees, as she spoke), "if you could have stewed yourself up in that small room and finished that paltry bunch of roses!"

"I suppose you don't know anything of my

pleasure," I replied, "and I am sure you don't sympathise at all with my tastes, you naughty little puss you; but I am going to be generous and sympathise with you nevertheless."

"I don't think, sister dear, that it will be a very great stretch of generosity on your part to do that; I know somebody that likes a sail 'o'er the dark blue sea,' and 'music on the waters,' as well as I do!"

"Well, perhaps you are right; but don't you think it is rather much of a poetical licence to call floating down with the tide a sail o'er the wavy, breezy ocean? And for the 'music on the waters,' I suppose that's a piece of imagination altogether."

"No, there you are wrong; but permit me to remind you," and Aggie assumed the air of dictator, "of what papa said this morning when he told us to be early, 'That time and tide wait for no man.' So, have you got that golden hair of yours combed enough now; for see, here am I acting waiting-maid to your royal highness, and holding your hat and scarf."

"Thank you, that will do, Agnes," and assuming an air of stately condescension, I took my hat and scarf from her hand and moved with as much majesty as I could towards the door.

"Bravo, Cecile! you would make a capital queen with that long neck and finely-poised head," said Agnes, seemingly well-pleased at me entering into her freak of the moment, "and the queen of

my heart you ever will be, my own Cecile." And with mock humility, she dropped on her knees and kissed my hand.

"Aggie, my darling Aggie, what ever has come over you this morning?" And I flung my arms round her neck and kissed her.

Tears filled her eyes immediately; but she brushed them away saying, "Come on, there's mamma at last."

"Mamma? you told me a quarter of an hour ago you heard her step."

"Yes, going to the nursery. Do you think I would have allowed you to have stayed and talk nonsense all this time if I had thought mamma was waiting for us?"

"Well, all I can say is, that it would not have been like Aggie. But Aggie is not like herself this morning."

"How do you mean, Cecile?"

It was perhaps fortunate that at that moment mamma requested us to take our seats, for it would have been difficult to define, either to Aggie's satisfaction or my own, wherein she was not like herself. For one thing, she generally was a quiet undemonstrative little body; now, this morning her spirits were exuberant, and she was talkative to a degree I never saw before; for another, her little pale face and grey eyes, although very lovely to me, were very apt to pass unnoticed by others; now this morning it was absolutely impossible not

to notice her pink flushed cheek, and brilliantly liquid eye. Her simple white dress too, and leghorn hat, with its broad pink ribbon, seemed to possess an unutterable charm. She seemed to me bewitching; and as she tripped lightly down the gravel walk before me (I was going to use a popular phrase and say to her fate) to the phaeton, I thought to myself, What a pretty little thing she is; and if I were a man I fancied she was just the sort of girl I would like to marry; and then, while we drove down to the port, I kept wondering if anybody would ever fall in love with Aggie; and if so, what then? Would she love him? Would they get married? But I did not care to pursue my speculations further. The bare possibility of Aggie getting married and leaving, suggested quite enough of misery for one morning, and that the morning of a day of pleasure. If I began in that strain, how would I end? So I changed the subject as speedily as possible, and began talking and playing with Susy. But this occupation was suddenly put a stop to by our arrival at our destination.

Yes, there, close to the quay lay the "Bride of the Ocean" in all her new-born splendour, bright with paint, radiant with gilding, fluttering with colours. How graceful she looked with her tall tapering masts; her somewhat sharply rounded bow, and her elegant proportions! As she lay there in her holiday attire, one could scarcely

realise the idea that she was made to battle with the stormy ocean, to brave the hurricane, the breaker, and the tempest. Quite a crowd was collected on the quay watching the preparations for sailing, and making remarks on her size and appearance.

We were just in time. The ropes were being uncoiled from the stakes on shore, and drawn on board. My father shook his hand good-naturedly, and cried, as he sprung ashore to assist my mother, "Come awa', come awa'; in five minutes we would hae been off without ye. Jump oot, ye youngsters; what are ye waitin' for noo?"

If we had lost time before, there certainly was none lost now; for we were swung from one end of the plank to the other by the sailors, and were on board ere we knew what we were doing. My father was the last to leave the shore, and as he, disdaining the use of the plank, lightly sprang on board, the crowd raised a cheer. He turned, lifted his hat, bowed, and thanked them. This was the signal for renewed cheering, and for the band on board (Aggie was right then) to strike up, "For he's a right good fellow." The sailors, as might have been expected, now caught the infection, and the cheering was continued between the shore and the vessel, till the captain gave orders to get the ship immediately under weigh.

On the quarter-deck, to which we had been conducted, we found a small party of friends who had

been invited to join us in our sail:—Mrs Macduff and her two daughters, Maria and Georgina; Leebie Burns, a school acquaintance of Aggie's and mine; Mr Grasmere, a rich farmer and cattle-dealer, who was a great crony of my father's for the nonce; Mr Miller, an enterprising young baker and corn-merchant; Robert Macgregor, our confidential clerk; and one or two others. My mother and Mrs Macduff sat down at once on camp stools which had been provided, whilst we "youngsters," as my father would call us, kept moving about, gazing at the shore, looking over the ship sides into the water, examining the helm, wondering at the compass, asking absurd questions at the man who now took his place at the wheel, and delighted beyond expression when the end of the last great rope, on being unfastened, fell with a splash into the water, and liberally sprinkled hats, faces, ringlets and dresses with the liquid spray.

At last we were off, and amidst renewed cheers from the shore, caught up and continued by those on board, the gallant vessel stood out into the mid channel, while our band played "Britannia rules the waves." "And long may she rule them too, God bless her," said our brave, hardy master, Captain Reid. "It makes my old heart young again, that music, and puts me in mind of the days when I used to be a boatswain to the 'Spitfire.' I suppose I was no better than I should have been at that time, any more than my mates; but what-

ever our faults, there was one thing we never forgot, and that was the honour of the dear old country."

"I'm sure ye didna," said my father, to whom this remark had been addressed; "and in my opinion the love o' oor country comes next to oor love o' God; an' I winna believe that a man whose heart throbs wi' love to his country will ever fa' into a dishonourin' crime." "Am I no right, Cecile?" continued he, suddenly addressing himself to me. "Ye love your country, I'm sure?"

"Oh yes, papa!" And my cheeks glowed as I spoke. Simple as the question was, it stirred a chord which vibrated through my heart.

"Ah, Miss Cecile, you are one of the right sort!" And the captain, as we called him, looked approvingly at me.

"That she is, Captain," said Mr Miller, who, attracted no doubt as I had been by the conversation, had joined us unnoticed; "an' what's mair, there's no a bonnier lassie in Scotland;" and he fixed a pair of bright black eyes on my face with an expression which retained the glow there. "I'll tell ye what it is, Mr Raye, gin ye gie me £500 wi' that lassie, I'll mak' her my wife the morn;" and he laid his hand on my shoulder.

Pride, indignation, and scorn filled my heart to bursting. I turned upon the young man a look which meant to express them, and dashed off to the side of Georgina Macduff without waiting to hear my father's answer.

"What's the matter?" asked this young lady. "You are in a state; what did he say to you?"

"Oh, nothing; at least nothing particular." And then I muttered to myself, "Impertinent!"

"Oh, I see how it is," said Georgina; "the young man's been makin' love to you, that's all. I suppose you are not used to that sort of thing." And she smiled graciously so as to give me to understand that it was quite in her way.

"No; and I hope I never shall, if that style of thing is called love-making." I spoke bitterly; indignation was still surging in my breast.

Georgina smiled again, tossed her long spiral, *red* ringlets, which hung down from her pink silk bonnet to her wasp-like waist, and said, "Well, I don't know, I've lots of lovers, and I rather like being made love to. It's capital fun."

I looked at Georgina for a moment wonderingly. I did not doubt she spoke the truth. In spite of her red ringlets and tight-lacing (how things alter: tight-lacing was the fashion then, and red hair is come into fashion now!)—in spite of these I say, Georgina was a handsome, dashing girl with bright blue eyes and dazzling teeth; and as she was full two years older than I, she occasionally took me under her patronage, and gave me a little insight into the ways of the world; an insight for which (if truth must be told) I was not at all grateful. I pre-

ferred my own world, with its bright dreams, its fair imaginings, and its noble ideals, much to hers. Preferred! I never thought of comparing them; never! Notwithstanding this, Georgina often amused if she did not interest me. And I could sit weaving day-dreams all the while that her light, silly, sometimes foolish talk, was falling on my ear, and her musical chit-chat producing on my mind something of the effect of a babbling brook or murmuring ocean. It was possibly this very indifference that made me such a good listener, and therefore led Georgina to prefer my society. However that may be, one thing is certain, that during our last year at school we were regarded as sworn friends and close allies. The friendship, if worthy of that name, was cemented very much by my power of listening, my disposition to oblige, so far as working out certain sums which Georgina declared to be a mere waste of time, and for which she said she "had neither capacity nor inclination."

Her last remark, however, had somewhat disenchanted any fancied friendship I may have felt for her. I will not say that I never thought of love; indeed, it was scarcely in nature for a maiden of sixteen not to do so. But the ideal love which my imaginings pictured was of a very exalted nature; a love, the purity of which a breath might destroy; a love to be thought about, dreamed about, but *spoken* about—never!

And Georgina could speak of having "lots of

lovers," and love-making being capital fun! What sort of girl could she be then? And again I looked at her wonderingly.

She caught me in the act, and cried, "Now what in the world are you about, trying to bewitch me or mesmerize me with those unearthly eyes of yours? I declare you make me feel quite queer staring at me in that way. I 'll tell you what it is, Cecile, if you had lived a hundred years ago you would have been burnt for a witch!"

"Well, perhaps; but I beg your pardon, I was not aware I was staring; I was thinking."

"Thinking, were you! Oh here is Mr Miller, he must have been thinking too, for he has been staring the last few minutes."

Mr Miller! It was the signal for me to be off; and so saying, "Where's Aggie? I wonder where Aggie is? Excuse me, Georgina, I must look for Aggie," I was off in an instant.

I found the company broken up into parties: Susan and Leebie Burns; Mamma and Mrs Macduff still chatting in their places; Mr Grasmere and Robert both making themselves as agreeable as possible to Miss Macduff, who was a nice looking girl, two years older than her sister, and without her dash; but Aggie—nowhere.

At last, after going almost round the ship, I discovered her sitting at the side of the cabin door in a quiet corner by herself.

"O Cecile!" she said, as soon as she saw me,

"I am *so* glad you have come. Isn't this beautiful?"

"What, Aggie?"

"Oh everything! the water, the hills, the mountains, the trees, and the blue, blue skies! O Cecile, just look how they are all reflected in the water!" Aggie was right. It was scarcely possible to conceive a more beautiful scene, and yet a scene which may often be met on the rivers and lakes of Scotland.

"And you little selfish puss, you have run away from us to enjoy this pleasure in solitude?" I said.

"And to listen to the music. O Cecile, listen! they have begun again, and now it is—yes it is, 'Still so gently o'er me stealing'; and a few minutes ago they played your favourite serenade, 'Com e gentil.'"

"Did they?" And then we both were silent till they finished the exquisite air which, however old-fashioned it may be esteemed now, will never cease to be dear to the lover of music.

By and by it was finished, and then I said, "Aggie, you 've been having quite a monopoly of pleasure here. I wonder none of us noticed the beautiful landscape, nor heard that fine music."

"I daresay you 've been talking or thinking, Cecile, or I'm sure they never would have escaped your observation."

"Yes, I 've been thinking, *cara mia*, and not the pleasantest of thoughts either," I said.

"What about?" And Aggie looked in my face with anxiety as she put the question.

"Oh about various things," I replied; "but come, I'm not going to spoil your pleasure. I wish they would play 'Com e gentil' over again. I think I shall go and ask them."

"No, don't;" and Aggie caught my dress as I turned to go. "We shall be discovered, and then farewell to happiness."

"But I'm in earnest, Aggie; I do really want to hear my favourite air, so—" and I looked round. "Oh this will do;" and beckoning a young sailor lad who was lingering near, I gave him my commission, which he at once executed; and once more the strains of the beautiful serenade floated o'er the waters, and echoed along the shore.

We were now making considerable progress. The tug had got her steam up, and the sailors had just spread several snowy sails to catch the southern breeze which had come with the turn of the tide, and which, with its pleasant breath, fanned our burning brows. The ripples rose and kissed the prow, and made music under our feet. We sisters gave ourselves up to the enchantment of the hour. Aggie still sat, and I stood beside her with my hand on her shoulder, eagerly endeavouring to descry all the spots on the shore in which we felt an interest. We had just caught a glimpse of Rosedean with its white-washed walls and dark green trees; with its pasture-fields stretching down

to the very edge of the river, and its cattle grazing peaceably, heedless of the reflection in the river, or of the very lively landscape to which they gave life, when Robert came up to remind us that luncheon was ready. So, sacrificing our intellectual to our material gratification, we rejoined our party, who were already seated at a table which had been hastily extemporised on deck; they having declined, with good reason, to go below when everything was so pleasant around and overhead.

Everybody was now in good spirits; eyes were glistening, corks were flying; sandwiches were disappearing; jokes and laughter passing from one end of the table to the other. What would a pleasure trip be without luncheon? The sailors seemed to enjoy the fun; and made themselves very useful in waiting upon us. One young man was so conspicuous in this way that he attracted my father's attention, and on his leaving to procure something which was wanted, he asked, "What young man is that, Captain? I dinna think I have seen him before."

"I don't think you have," replied Captain Reid, "he came to me after the launch yesterday, asking if I wanted any hands, and saying he wished to be a sailor. I rather liked the cut o his jib, so I told him I wanted one at any rate, but I was afraid he was too old, as I supposed he had never been to sea before. But the poor fellow begged so hard, and said he would be so willing to

learn and do his best, that I told him I would take him on trial this voyage, and then we would see what could be done, so he came on board this morning. I hope I've not done wrong, sir?"

"No, no, I like the lad's face mysel'; do you ken where he comes from?"

"No, he did not tell me that; indeed, he was not disposed to be communicative; but he referred to some quarrel with his stepmother; and indeed, sir," continued the captain smiling, "I think we are all under a deep obligation to these stepmothers, as but for them I don't see how the navy would be manned!"

We all smiled at this sally of the captain's, and then my mother asked his name.

"He calls himself Frank Innes," said the captain; but who knows if it is his real name. Young fellows who quarrel with their stepmothers generally sail under false colours."

"Frank Innes! Frank Innes! A pretty name," I said to myself.

At this moment the band struck up "The Red Coats," a quadrille which was quite the rage that season, and a dance was immediately proposed.

No sooner said than done. Table, seats, cleared away in an instant, and couples to their feet.

Would I dance? Not if I could be done without, and I waited hopefully. Mr Miller and Maria, Robert and Georgina, Susan and Leebie, and—O yes, Mr Grasmere and Mrs Macduff—the cham-

pagne has produced its effect on the good-natured, pleasure-loving little matron. "That 's right, Mrs Macduff;" shouted my father from the other side of the ship, "try if you can get my wife to follow your example; a little exercise of that kind would do her gude." But my mother shook her head gently and decidedly at this proposal. And then approaching us my father said, "And, dear me, there 's my twa lassies sittin' lookin' as if they had rheumatism in their joints; bless me, bairns, what are ye thinkin aboot? get t' your legs directly, and get the red into your cheeks!"

"But, papa," I remonstrated, "there 's no part ners, and we're not required."

"Pairtners! required!—dance together then, lat folk see ye hae the use o' your legs. And nothing would satisfy him but Aggie and me rising and going through the evolutions of the quadrille at some distance from the others, and then he walked off. Of course we soon tired of the prescribed exercise, and once more glided off to our favourite position. This time, however, we did not content ourselves with the seat behind the cabin door, but went and stood close at the side of the vessel. It was exciting; we were now going at a considerable rate through the water; and the clipper-built barque, with her light ballast, was pitching from side to side. The objects on the land were now becoming so indistinct that with the naked eye it was impossible to recognise them;

and we amused ourselves with leaning over the side of the ship, and catching the glistening spray whenever the roll of the vessel gave us an opportunity. Childlike enough our amusement was, I admit. But then we were little more than children—I turned sixteen, and Aggie just fourteen; and besides I must plead guilty to the fault (if it is one) of carrying a good deal of this childishness with me through life. So we caught the pearl-like spray, peered down into the dark blue waters, and wondered and watched to see whether a mermaid or an Undine would appear in its liquid depths, when, all at once, Aggie over-balanced herself, and with a shriek which rose high above the strains of music, fell headlong into the water.

Fortunately she had been noticed, for ere I had time to draw my breath, or the others to rush to the ship's side, some one plunged in after her. They rose to the surface at the same time, but at some distance from each other; however, we breathless onlookers saw that the young sailor—Frank Innes, for it was he—had all his presence of mind about him, for he swam out boldly in her direction, and almost before we could speak he caught Aggie, and supporting her head above the water with one arm, he struck out with the other towards the ship.

"Brave fellow! he has done it!" cried the captain, who was the first to speak.

"Thank God! but is she safe?" asked my

father, seeing that Frank and his burthen were falling rapidly behind the ship.

"Yes, yes, look there," said the captain, and he pointed to a boat, which with the promptitude which usually characterises sailors, had been at once lowered, and was now rowing towards them.

Not a word was spoken till we saw Frank and his charge safely placed in the boat, and then a great sigh of relief escaped from most of us. My poor mother fell back in a faint in my father's arm, and I—but why speak of myself? the agony of that moment shall never be forgotten!

In another minute they were on board, and Aggie, poor Aggie, with her sweet eyes closed, her long brown hair dishevelled, and her white robes, dripping and saturated, clinging round her delicate limbs, was at once carried to the captain's bed, and everything done which affection and consideration could suggest. Her dripping garments were pulled off; warm blankets wrapped around her, and stimulants administered. After nearly a quarter of an hour of fearful suspense, her snowy lids were slowly raised; she drew a long breath, started up, and with a somewhat wild expression in her usually soft hazel eyes, cried, "Cecile! Cecile! Where am I?—where have I been?"

I clasped my hands in an agony of delight; my heart felt bursting with an overflow of gratitude which I could not have borne, had it not found a

vent in secret aspirations and fervent ejaculations, which ascended on the wings of faith and love to the throne of the Eternal. There are some moments in our existence so drugged with deepest anguish, or so sweetened with ecstatic bliss, that a lifetime seems compressed into their narrow limits —a lifetime of misery, or a lifetime of happiness; may they not be a foretaste of that state when "*time shall be no more?*"

Something of this kind had I experienced during the last short half hour, and now reaction came on. I was prostrated. Aggie was safe, and had fallen into a gentle slumber, and I felt total indifference as to myself or anything else in the world. I dragged myself to the nearest couch for my trembling limbs refused to support me, and with half shut eyes dozed dreamily, hearing no sound but Aggie's gentle breathing. In a short time the ladies one by one left the cabin, and mamma and I were left alone. Neither of us spoke; indeed, we both felt too weary and worn to have any inclination for conversation, and so the time passed on.

By and by, after what seemed to me a considerable period, I was somewhat suddenly started from my dreamless reverie by a rude shock; then there was a sound of voices, and then the vessel swung over till the cabin window almost touched the water, and remained in that position.

"O Cecile," said mamma, "I'm afraid something

dreadful has happened. Do get up and see what is wrong."

I with some difficulty dragged my unwilling limbs up the cabin stairs, and found a pretty state of confusion on deck. "The Bride of the Ocean" had got upon one of those shifting sand-banks, which, in spite of all the efforts of Navigation Commissioners, continued to obstruct the channel of our noble river; and all the efforts of the tug and skill of the captain were unable to get her off. No; there she lay, and "might lie," whispered the fears of my father and captain, for a fortnight, this being the last full tide. The situation was grave, if not serious; mortifying, if not dangerous. Even now each ebbing wave was leaving her higher and drier, so there was no time to be lost if we did not wish to spend a night on board. The little steam-tug was at once ordered alongside; and having come as near as possible without the risk of sharing the same fate as her gallant consort, we were with as much alacrity as possible placed on board, and steamed off, leaving the "Bride of the Ocean" "alone in her glory."

My father, I learned, had been the immediate cause of the accident. In his anxiety on Aggie's account he had insisted on the ship being put about immediately. The captain and pilot remonstrated, but in vain. "His daughter's life was of more value to him than all the ships in the world," he said. So his orders were obeyed. What the

captain dreaded occurred. Wind and tide were against him; the result has been seen.

Home, by our wearied out party, was reached at last, and this never-to-be-forgotten day closed; but its consequences! when did they end?

CHAPTER VII.

Frank.

NEXT morning when I came down stairs, a full hour later than usual, to breakfast, I was astonished to find, besides my father, Captain Reid and Frank Innes. With the usual morning salutations, however, I took my place quietly at the top of the table, and began the duty, which had now been mine for some time, of pouring out the tea, assured that my curiosity would soon be fully satisfied without the need of any useless questions. Nor was I mistaken; for the gentlemen had scarcely taken their places at the table before my father said, "You see, Cecile, I have brought you strangers this morning—strangers! what am I sayin'! Ye ken the captain" (at which Captain Reid and I interchanged glances and smiles); "an' neither you nor me, nor ony o' us, will ever forget this young man," pushing Frank in the side as he spoke;

"for ye ken that in all human probability Aggie would have been droon'd but for him!"

Yes it was quite true,—appallingly true,—Aggie would have been drowned but for him—him! In my thankfulness for her safety I had forgotten the means; and now I blamed myself for ingratitude. I had not so much as thanked this young sailor lad for the preservation of a life which seemed dearer to me than my own! And yet thanks seemed to me such a poor thing. If I could fall at his feet and pour out my gratitude in words capable of expressing the feelings of my heart, it might do; but thanks!

Irresolute, I glanced in his direction, and met a pair of merry blue eyes; yes, merry by habit and repute, I could see that; and they belonged to one of those sunshiny faces which one does not often see in this world of care. A sunshiny face with features,—well, perhaps the less that's said about them the better,—for I don't think there was one which was strictly regular in the classical sense of the term; but features, nevertheless, which suited each other, and suited the face amazingly well. Then as for dimples, it seemed to me that they were everywhere—on the cheeks, on the chin, specially round the mouth, with its straight, fine set teeth. He never spoke, smiled, nor laughed, but some one or other of these bewitching dimples came in play. *Au reste*, what would you have? His head was small, his hair fair, or rather flaxen, with a ten-

dency to fall in a wavy curl, and his complexion, where not exposed to the sun, of a clear, healthy whiteness. It will be objected, I doubt not, that Frank, from the description I have given, must have been effeminate in appearance. Not so, I assure you; with mouth, with dimples, with hair that might have suited a woman, there was nothing but manliness, self-reliant manlinesss, in the expression, in the contour of the head, and in the figure, which, still that of a stripling, nevertheless gave promise of great strength.

This full-length likeness was not, I need scarcely say, taken at one glance, or for that matter at a hundred. I paint now as I write from memory; and I only hope that you may enjoy part of the pleasure that fills my heart at the present moment; for the very writing of this recalls to me a period —brief and short-lived, it is true—on which I ever look as a bright, the very brightest, part indeed of my somewhat eventful life!

But to return. Breakfast was passing, and still I had uttered no word of thanks; but my interest in the young man was increased by seeing his arm in a sling; and by ascertaining that it was on account of this fracture—received when he sprang overboard, he knew not how, and forgotten in the excitement of the moment—that Captain Reid had brought him this morning to Dunearn to have it examined by a surgeon. The examination had taken place; and not only that, but the arm which,

unfortunately had been broken in two places, was carefully bandaged and bound up. So for six weeks or more was poor Frank condemned to lead a useless and inactive life! The chain of events is begun, you perceive. This is the first link. But don't be in too great a hurry, please, in drawing inferences: things do turn out differently sometimes from what the most experienced novel reader may hope or expect.

Breakfast finished, my father and the captain rose to go; the former saying before he left the room, "Cissy, lassie, I leave this young man to your care. You 'll be gude to him, I ken. Never forget what he has done; and tell your mother that he's to stay here till his arm's strong again; whether it be six weeks, or six months, it's a' ane."

Frank began to thank him, but he was stopped at once. "Thank me! man dinna ye ken that if I gave ye every penny I hae in the world, I would not think mysel' oot o' your debt: na, na." And my father was gone.

Left alone together, my first sensation was a rushing of the blood to my cheeks and temples, and my next a feeling of intense shame at my silliness, which I doubt not retained the blood there, for all that morning I have a vivid recollection that my cheeks were all a-glow, and that my temples throbbed and burned most unpleasantly.

Notwithstanding my ardent wish to utter a word expressive of my gratitude, Frank was the

first to speak. "So it seems," he said, "that I'm to be a useless being for an indefinite time. How I hate idleness! *mais cependant*, I must not repine; and your father is very good, and has condemned me to very pleasant quarters, and committed me to the care of a very fair jailor!" And he bowed with an air of gallantry to me as he spoke.

There was not much in this pretty little speech, but to me it was fascinating and suggestive of a whole train of ideas concerning the speaker: it was fascinating because of the musical voice, and suggestive on account of the correct pronunciation, the pure accent, and the polished manner. Frank Innes evidently belonged to a class of society with which I was by no means familiar; but the refinement of which I not unfrequently sighed for amidst the somewhat rough-mannered mortals who most generally frequented my father's house. Who then was this young stranger—thrown into my company so suddenly, so unexpectedly; and bound to me, to us all, by such a bond of gratitude?

However anxious I might be to have this question answered, it was by no means the time to put it; so I contented myself with saying, "You know French then?"

"*Assez bien;*" he replied, smiling, "that is to say, I know a few phrases, and have read one or two books in the original, 'Paul and Virginia,' for instance."

"Paul and Virginia!" I exclaimed, "what a

host of pleasant recollections the very name recalls. Do you know it was the first—the very first romance I ever read. I was living at Rosedean then, and everything comes back to my mind as if it were yesterday:—the old garret, the heap of discarded books, the air laden with the smell of plant and flower which stole in through the half open sky-light; the knot in the glass which prism-like threw rainbow hues into the cobwebbed recesses, and even the old spider which, in revenge, I suppose, for the disturbance I had caused, wandered restlessly up and down and over my light chintz frock. And do you know," I continued with *naïveté*, "that for a long while after I kept looking out for some one like Paul, feeling sure I would love him as Virginia had done; but it was no use, I never saw any one that was the least like him—never! and I don't think I ever shall." And then I sighed a foolish little sigh over my girlish disappointment.

I had been speaking partly to my companion, and partly thinking aloud, with my head bent forward and my eyes fixed on the ground. When I ceased there was no reply, and lifting my head my eyes fell on a large mirror above the mantel piece, in which I caught the reflection of Frank's face gazing at me with an expression which did put me in mind of the likeness of Paul in the well remembered woodcut; I started, and withdrew my eyes from the glass, and as I did so, Frank said, "I don't know, Miss Raye; but if you have not

found your Paul I have found my Virginia." And it was his turn to feel confused; but I, with that tact which is part of our heritage, saw at once that such conversation would never do, and coming to the rescue with a laugh, which, whether real or not, did not much signify, said, "Well, now we have had quite enough romance for one morning, don't you think? so, as I suppose you are fond of reading, I will give you some of my pretty books if you come into the drawing-room, and then I must go to Aggie, she will think I have forgotten her."

"How is my poor little water-nymph this morning?" asked Frank, having regained his smiling composure; "I have quite forgotten to inquire for her."

"She is quite well, but listless and weary, thank you; and I too have been negligent, How is your poor arm?"

"O, bad enough, I assure you, and sometimes it twitches sadly; but I am thankful enough it is not my leg; just fancy me condemned to lie perfectly still for six weeks!" And he made such a grimace, that notwithstanding my sympathy with the unfortunate arm, I could not help laughing.

At last I saw him safely ensconced on a couch in the drawing-room, with all my collection of handsomely bound books beside him on a small table, which I had placed for his accommodation, and having in this way given tangible proof of my gratitude,—for be it observed that the books turned

out were mine, and had been received either as prizes or bought with my carefully hoarded pocket-money, and always kept under lock and key from hands and eyes profane,—I left him and went up stairs to Aggie.

I found this darling sister still in bed, very pale and very quiet. "She had got up," she said, "but finding herself unable to stand, had got into bed again, and had commenced thinking and thinking over the events of yesterday." I could see she had been deeply affected, for the traces of tears were still upon her cheeks though there was no redness about the eyes; Aggie being one of the very few I have ever seen to whom tears were becoming. I kissed her pale moist cheek, and told her I had come to talk with her and cheer her up, and that there must be no thinking till she was stronger. She smiled a smile of acquiescence, and then I said,

"I have got a piece of news for you, Aggie. Can you guess who's here?"

She smiled and shook her head; how can I, Cecile, there are always so many going and coming. But wait a minute, is it any one I know?"

"Well I should think you ought, if you don't know him."

"*Him!* it is a him then; let me see,—Mr Grasmere?" I shook my head, "Mr Mil—" I put my hand upon her lips, "Don't mention that name—never again; do you understand me, I dislike, I hate that man." I spoke passionately, almost

fiercely. Aggie looked frightened, and said, "O Cecile dear, I thought you were too good to hate anybody; just suppose now if a person were to die, or be drowned as I might have been yesterday, how would it do to have the heart full of hatred?" And Aggie's tears flowed anew.

I felt rebuked, but seeing it was no time to make confessions, I contented myself with kissing her and saying, "Come now, try again, you've been very cold."

The sweet girl smiled through her tears, and said, "Well, perhaps Uncle Charlie!"

"No, no, no, it's no use, you must give it up; I see I shall have to tell you." And with a pretended air of mystery, I bent forward and whispered a name in her ear.

But I was not prepared for the result. She almost sprang from the bed, while a flush of brightest vermillion overspread her pale face, and exclaiming, "What, my preserver! my deliverer! Cecile, I must get dressed, I must go and tell him how deeply I'm indebted to him! You will help me, won't you sister dear? Oh, if you only knew the horrors I have endured! and when I think that but for him I might have been drowned—drowned, and hurried into the presence of God unprepared, without hope, without—" She stopped and put her hands before her face.

I could do nothing but kiss her and try to soothe her: as I said, I was not prepared for this. If

ever there was one who might be thought a sincere Christian girl, Aggie, in her gentle reticence, was such an one. But when I hinted this, she broke out, "Cecile, Cecile, I once deceived myself with some idea of this sort; but when one comes, as I did yesterday, to face death, to see in a moment every thought, deed, and action, rise up before the mind, ah, where, where can the trembling soul take shelter?"

Overpowered with her earnestness, I answered solemnly, "Aggie, there is but one place, but one spot, to which we can flee; mother has told us of it; the Bible tells us of it; it is to the cross of Christ: Aggie, under it we shall be safe. Shall we go there now?" And I fell upon my knees by the bedside and prayed, and Aggie joined me, and we sisters wept and prayed together, till a feeling of peace fell upon her troubled mind and I felt strengthened and comforted. After this we talked long and earnestly till at last Aggie started up and said, "I have forgotten, Cecile, Frank will be gone, I must get up—must."

I laid my hand gently on her shoulder and said, "There's no hurry Aggie, Frank will be here for two or three days, perhaps for two or three weeks."

Her cheeks blanched, and she looked at me questioningly. I explained; I told her of his accident, and endeavoured to re-assure her. But in vain, it was too much for the poor little thing's shattered nerves; she turned on her bed and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER VIII.

Love's Young Dream.

TWO summer months passed, bright with happiness, and yet so unruffled, so smooth and placid in their simple monotony, so unmarked by incident, that it was only by the long trail of light they left behind them, and which served to intensify the gloom that followed, that I knew they were gone!

During those months of July and August, Frank, Aggie, and I, had rambled, had read, and had gardened, or rather we girls had gardened while Frank chatted, or sung, or read as the case might be, for his arm, though getting well, was still not strong enough for manual toil.

My first inference concerning Frank had proved correct. He had evidently received an education much superior to that usually received by farmers' sons, and from the few hints he dropped, and they were very few, for, open and candid though he was by

nature, he was carefully reserved when the question referred to home, kindred or friends, we ascertained that during his mother's life his education had been entrusted to a resident tutor, under her most careful superintendence, for he was an only child, and, that, after her death he had been sent to a public school, but whether in England or Scotland we were allowed to guess.

"Strange," said my father to him one evening in our hearing, "that a parent should allow an only son to slip out of his fingers as you have done; it would be a cleverer lad than ever I saw that would serve me that trick!"

Frank reddened. "Perhaps, sir; but I took my precautions well," and perhaps," he continued, in a lower and somewhat hesitating tone of voice, "perhaps my father does not care to find me; I may have offended him so seriously in my passionate haste, that perhaps he will never forgive me—never." And the young man laid his head upon the table and covered his face with his hands.

The sight of his emotion overcame us; my mother looked distressed, and my father approaching him, laid his hand on his shoulder and said, "Come, come, this'll never do; ye maun cheer up. I daresay your father is just as anxious to forgive as you to be forgiven. I'll write to him the nicht, if ye like to give me his direction."

Frank looked up; a sudden ray of light dimpled his face, but it speedily disappeared, and he said,

"No, no, sir; you are very good, very kind, but you do not know all the circumstances of the case; I have a stepmother, you know, and—and—but it's no use saying any more about it. I could not live at home, at least not quite at present." And Frank drew a deep sigh.

"Well, well; we'll say no more about it just now. But be a gude lad, an' it'll a' come richt by and by; an' never forget to ask God to give ye a forgivin' spirit, for how can we expect Him to forgive us if we do not forgive others?"

"I won't forget, sir," said Frank humbly. And from that evening no further reference was made to a subject which had been evidently productive of pain. And I believe we all more or less sympathised with Frank; and thought, with our mother, that while perhaps he had acted hastily and imprudently, yet it was no trifle which would have driven a young man of a character so winning, and a temper so gentle, to forsake his father and his home.

But during these two months, while this stranger youth was an honoured and welcome guest under our roof, I was conscious of a great change passing over me; a new element of happiness seemed introduced into my life. My heart used to throb and swell with a feeling to which I had been long a stranger, but which put me in mind of the flutter-fluttering I felt when, as a child, I used to love *baby Charlie*. I did not know the cause of this

change then, and I certainly did not care either to reason about it, or to analyse my feelings on the subject. Enough for me, I was happy—wonderfully, mysteriously happy. I enjoyed the present without venturing to dream of the future. At night, when I laid my head upon my pillow, the happiness of the day seemed to accompany me to my slumber, and airy visions and musical sounds delighted my sleeping eyes and ravished my closed ears; and in the morning when I sprang from my couch, full of the joyous vigour and health of youth, I sometimes, on looking in my glass, could scarcely recognise myself. For (would you believe it?) a corresponding change seemed to have passed over my appearance. Instead of a pale and somewhat sickly-looking complexion, I found a delicate bloom, not stationary it is true, but deepening or paling with every passing emotion; while my eyes, which ever since a certain day long ago, had retained a saddened, weird-like expression in their deep blue, now assumed the warmer tint of the violet, and often flashed with light in their liquid brilliancy. I had no feeling of vanity on witnessing this change. I was too much astonished at it, and it seemed, as I stood before my glass brushing out my long hair, which fell curling in graceful masses round my shoulders, that it was another being altogether on whom I was gazing, and not on myself. Nor was this a delusion springing from imagination; others noticed it as well as myself.

Aggie often threw her arms round me, and said, "Cecile, dear, I don't understand it, but I think you are growing lovely and lovelier every day. Pray, what good fairy has come to your assistance? Positively, if you go on at this rate, I shall expect to see you transformed into a diamond starred princess some of these days, with glass slippers and all." To which I would gaily cry, "You are quite right, Aggie love, I am indebted to two charming little fairies—shall I tell you their names? Well, then, they are called sisterly love and happiness!" And as a *finale* to such fine speeches, Aggie and I would twine our arms round each other and waltz round the room, in the midst of which, perhaps, Frank would enter and beg and implore to be allowed to join the performance, when, ashamed of our childishness, we would, with blushing cheeks, stop our dance and scamper out of the room! Ah! those were days of light-hearted gaity, never to be recalled. Even now, passion—seething, scorching passion—was, unknown to us, springing up in our three young hearts, and preparing to pour over their sweet freshness from its volcanic depths, lava, dust, ashes!

But the pleasure of knowing myself beautiful was not confined to beholding myself in a glass, or to hearing about it from sweet Aggie's gentle lips; no, I saw it in the eyes of others, in the eyes of my parents; and, sweeter far, in—well, I need not mind confessing it now—in those bright blue

merry eyes which had struck my fancy the first day I beheld them. Tell me, O woman, is there a pleasure greater in this world than seeing, feeling, being conscious of your beauty by reading it in the eyes of the man you love? Ay, love! the secret is out at last; this was the magic wand which had painted my cheek, given light to my eyes, buoyancy to my step, and music to my voice; this was the talisman which had lightened every labour and sweetened every duty; this the draught which steeped my soul, my senses, in Elysium! As yet I scarcely knew all this myself; I had not as yet tasted the tree of knowledge, but the hand was already stretched out. Would I had been driven from my paradise ere the deed was accomplished!

The last day of August came, and on the morrow Frank must leave for London. The "Bride of the Ocean" had been in that port for six weeks, taking in her cargo for China, and was now ready to sail immediately. So go he must. Indeed, there was not the shadow of excuse, even if he had wished it, to remain. But he did not wish it. Happy though I knew he was, pleasantly though his time had passed, there were moments when he chafed and fretted at the idle life he was leading, and fancied he was intruding on my father's hospitality.

His box, corded, stood in the hall; the side table on which his small store of books was placed was empty; the little gifts which we had prepared for

him had been given and received; and nothing now remained to be done on this last evening but to bid our farewells, for at a very early hour to-morrow morning he was to go.

From the uncertainty which compasses everything in this world, farewell saying, under any circumstances, is always a somewhat sad affair; but to bid farewell with a loved one who goeth down to the sea in ships, and seeth God's working in the mighty deep; who is exposed to great and unseen dangers; and whose chances of return are so precarious, is a trial, the agony of which can only be known by experience. This coming parting had been casting its cold, cruel shadow over my heart for days before. And now the hours, the minutes, the moments drew nearer, and it was come! I saw my mother embrace him as a son; for she felt as a mother to the motherless lad; I heard my father bless him, give him his advice, and tell him that "he would never forget—never—what he had done for him and his;" I saw Frank kiss Susie, and clasp Aggie's hand; I heard his trembling "good-bye," and my time was come, it could be deferred no longer. I extended my cold hand. He took it; my fingers trembled as it lay for a moment in his. A gentle pressure on his part, and I ventured to raise my eyes to his. He was bending towards me; his breath fanned my brow: "Cecile," he whispered, "farewell." My lips quivered; I turned my head aside; and it was over!

Next morning Frank was gone. And what did it signify to me that everything in the world went on as usual—that the sun shone—the day and night followed each other—that I rose, dressed, walked, ate, drank—what did it signify? The light of my life was gone, the world must henceforth be to me a dreary blank—at least till—till he came back. But would he ever come back? Ah, why did he ever come?—why did I ever allow myself to love him? Did he know—would he ever know that I loved him? Foolish, foolish questions, which I put to my heart twenty times a day—foolish, foolish questions, which never were, and never could be answered!

How the weary winter that followed passed, I cannot tell. I led the life of an automaton; my painting, my music, had no charms for me. The only feeling I was conscious of was intense disgust at anything approaching to admiration from the opposite sex, of which it seemed during this particular winter I was unfortunately doomed to receive a great deal. Refuge in my own room was my only protection from Mr Miller, who either could not, or would not, understand my haughty coldness; but in the case of another, this was simply impossible.

Robert Macgregor, a strong, tall, good looking fellow of twenty, had been in my father's employment ever since I remembered. Beginning as a shop-boy, he had gone through all the successive

grades till he was now head and confidential clerk to my father. Robert, or Bob, as we more generally called him, was a Highlander, and, endued with even more than the usual plausibility of the race, he had succeeded in gaining and keeping the good-will of master and mistress, and every one about our house, almost from the first day he entered it. Living under the same roof, as the custom then was, he had constant opportunities of ingratiating himself with all the members of the family; and we sisters looked upon him as an elder brother. And nothing more natural; as children, he had spun pence for us, digged gardens, made ponds, constructed houses, and, as we grew up, he accompanied us to church, carrying our Bibles and our parasols, sometimes to an evening concert when my father's time was too much occupied to permit him to be our escort (for my mother seldom or never went); and somehow or other Bob never failed to be mixed up with all our little schemes of pleasure.

Nothing could have been more agreeable than this if it had continued, but to continue was simply impossible. I believe a change had taken place in Bob long before I noticed it, for it was not till Frank had been for some time our guest that I was struck by seeing an expression on his face by no means natural to it, namely, an expression of discontented gloom. On seeing me look at him, however, he speedily smoothed his contracted

brows, and assumed his good-natured face again. Once, when I caught him with one of these black looks, I cried out, "Oh, Bob! what in the world's wrong? I never thought you could look so cross!" At which his brow—kind, plausible Bob's brow—grew darker, and, with set teeth, he hissed out, "*You* need scarcely ask that question; if you don't know what's wrong, who does?" And, turning on his heel, he left the room. I was inclined, at first, to be vexed, but Frank and Aggie both laughed, then I joined them; and in my happiness the little incident was forgotten till circumstances forced it back to my memory.

But Frank was gone, and no gloom was on Robert's brow now; nothing but an expression of the tenderest devotion sat upon his features whenever, by chance, I happened to look at him. Oh dear, how tiresome he was! always meeting me in some unexpected way or other; clasping my hand on the slightest pretext; bending down, till I felt his breath on my cheek, to whisper some stale compliment in my ear; trying to coax me into playing a game of chess, or draughts, or to look at engravings, or to do anything, in short, that would isolate him and me from the rest of the family. Oh dear, dear, those miserable winter evenings! Better never to love than suffer thus. But do not think me selfish in my misery. I was sorry, very sorry, for Bob, I used to like him so much. There was not anything I would not have done to please

him but one, and unfortunately this one was the only thing he wanted. So there was nothing for it but let the game, the miserable game of cross purposes, go on. The only thing that gave me any pleasure during that weary winter was, strange to say, that from which I would have least expected it, the visits of Georgina Macduff. This young lady had formed, or had fancied she had formed, an attachment to Frank Innes; and ever since he sailed, she paid periodical visits to learn if we had received any word of the vessel, or any letters from him. On such occasions she generally spent the evening with us; and I would sit, needlework in hand, and listen with glowing cheek to her talk about Frank. Oh how I did love to hear his name even from her lips! And then she was so amusing in her open admiration of him and of his profession. She wore all that winter a jacket of naval blue adorned with anchored buttons, and a small necktie fastened in a sailor's knot, and very pretty she looked in her dress I assure you. Then she had some treasures besides, which on every visit she turned out for our inspection—a curl of his hair (how come by I never found out), a scrap of his writing, and a rose-bud dried which he had given her. There was also a little song of mine which I formerly was fond of and used to sing, but which now I could not sing for the world; it was called the "Sailor Boy," and for this also Georgina's affection was immense; she sang and played it

"*con amore,*" and though my feelings were too strong to permit me singing it myself, still the pleasure was very great of hearing a clear sweet voice sing,—

> "Then speed to the swelling sail,
> As it bounds o'er the dancing wave,
> And blessings attend on the little bark
> That brings home my sailor brave."

These visits then were the *ignes fatui* which lighted this gloomy winter, and very dark indeed they shewed it; but what could I expect? No pure, clear light from heaven shone upon my path. An idolatrous love engrossed my heart. My parents, my sisters, gentle Aggie even, were forgotten. Unmindful of the bitter lesson of childhood, I was once more walking in the light of my own eyes, and hewing out to myself cisterns broken and empty. But the day of reckoning was coming.

CHAPTER IX.

Under the Beech Tree.

TIME takes no cognisance of happiness or misery, but heedless alike of the smiles of the joyful and the tears of the wretched, holds on his unvarying course. Winter passed, the singing of the birds was once more heard, summer roses had given place to autumn poppies, and still the idol of my heart was absent. The listlessness and weariness which had hung about me all winter did not disappear, as my mother had expected, with milder weather, but, on the contrary, rather seemed to increase. My face, always too faithful an index of the feeling of my heart, lost the radiant beauty which had so surprised myself and others during the past summer. Once more my cheek became pale, my eyes cold, and dark circles, those never-failing accompaniments of a highly sensitive and nervous organisation, shewed themselves round them. My

appearance alarmed my mother; friends, remembering the sudden flush of beauty, hinted at incipient consumption. On my account, therefore, was our usual visit to the sea-side hastened and prolonged, as my kind parents were gratified by beholding here, for the first time, some dissipation of my languor, and a slight improvement in my health; but they little knew the cause. I took no one into my confidence then. No! an idolatrous, soul-consuming love was my sole companion, and it, my familiar, dragged me to the sea with tremblings of delight which I cannot express. The sea! was not *he* upon it? The sea! how I loved it and its billowy foam. His spirit seemed to mingle with its waves, and I loved it wildly as a portion of himself. Sometimes I would lave my hands and face caressingly with its saline waters; at others I would bend down to its waves, and let my lips linger lovingly on them, while my heart throbbed fast with thoughts of Frank. O Frank! Frank! did the yearnings of our souls never meet on those dark blue waters? Yes they did, I know it; for, let cold materialism say what it will, spirits bound together with the bond of sympathy will hold communion even in this gross world.

The sea then was to me a possession, its moaning murmurs sweetest converse, its unbounded expanse an inexpressible delight. Often would I climb a steep rock, and sit for hours gazing in

solitude over its surging masses; and, when the moon rose, and her soft light slept upon it in troubled dreams, then from my lattice window I would, like the dark-eyed Eastern maid, stand and watch along the deep,

"For him whose smile first made me weep."

But our visit to the sea-side terminated, and with my return home my listless languor returned. Our physician, in his wisdom, prescribed two very good things,—country air, and new milk; so I was ordered out to Rosedean,—an order which I lost no time in carrying into effect.

The following afternoon I sauntered slowly out to the old farm-house. On approaching it, I was captivated by the beauty of the landscape. Always lovely, the scene was now particularly so. The fine old trees were dressed in autumn glory, and the golden barley, in many places still uncut, was shaded away into the pale yellow of the wheat stubble. The colouring was magnificent: broad masses of golden light in the foreground; heathered hills, purple, in the mid distance; and, far away, lofty mountains shading into the soft blue of the sky.

Ever a keen admirer of the beautiful, my heart swelled with delight. I was lost in the wondrous grandeur of nature, and it was with an utter forgetfulness for the moment of my selfish grief that I welcomed Uncle Charlie, who, gun on shoulder,

now came up to meet me. "My dear uncle," I cried, "I come to throw myself on your bounty; I am condemned by the doctor to the sweetest of exile,—Rosedean and its gifts: country air and new milk. Will you take pity on me?"

My uncle, whose face elongated a little at the mention of the doctor, nevertheless smiled as he replied, "The doctor never did a wiser thing in his life, in my opinion. Come away, we'll bathe you in sweet milk, if it 'll do you good! But you have not told me yet what is wrong with you, Cecile."

At this question I smiled, coloured, and, after hesitating a moment, said, "Well, seriously, I don't think there is anything really wrong; but it seems I have been looking paler than usual, and feel—well, I suppose I must say lazy; and mamma, dear kind mamma, got anxious, and called the doctor, though I told her it was no use; and——"

"But you were better when you were at the sea-side?" interrupted my uncle somewhat abruptly.

"Oh yes, yes, it was delightful! It's only the close air of Dunearn. I shall soon be all right at this dear old place. How lovely it looks!" and I ran on before my uncle, for I dreaded more questioning.

A few days passed, in which I enjoyed a species of happiness not by any means approximating to that which had filled my heart at the sea-side, but rather like the renewal, soothing and sweet, of an old friendship. Everything about the spot re-

minded me of days of happy calm, when my heart had neither tasted the sweetness of love nor its agony; days whose dewy freshness could never return. But would I wish them to return, even if they could? At this moment certainly not; to me the very bitterness of love was sweet. In this humour I would saunter about moralising, soliloquising, and questioning my own heart, conscious all the time of the sweet surroundings of the old place, and the balmy breath of the soft "Indian summer."

One afternoon, in my ramblings, I came to a spot which had been a favourite in childhood; a grassy mound, in the centre of which rose an ancient beech, which threw its great branches far and wide. This beech had been an object of interest and curiosity to me in other days, for on its bark were cut, in many a rude, rough form, the names of the generation who for more than half a century had lived, loved, and died under the roof of the old farm-house. On seeing it, the old feeling of interest returned, and I went close up to examine once more the hieroglyphics on its ancient trunk. Yes, here they were, some of the later cuttings distinct and smooth as ever, among which I saw my mother's name and my father's, both cut by him in the days of their love-making. Aunty Katharine's, too, was there traced by a loving hand also, and looked upon doubtless by many a weeping eye, for the date of her death was recorded below, and

Uncle Charlie's initials appended. Others were almost obliterated, and to a stranger would have passed for nothing but uncouth marks and scrawls on the smooth bark; but to me, who could still recognise them, what untold wealth of romance and love did they not unfold!

As I stood gazing on the hoary tree with its wondrous records, a sudden idea entered my brain. But no; I coloured at the thought. Then I reasoned with myself, "Why not? it will never be noticed; and if noticed, not known." My colour deepened; but the temptation was irresistible. I drew from my pocket a small sharp pen-knife, and having selected a spot beside an offshoot of young wood, which would act as a sort of screen, I commenced my work at once. I found my task a little more difficult than I had anticipated; nevertheless I worked away right willingly, my ear filled with the music of the little rippling brook which, concealed by a hedge, ran noisily on one side of the mound, and my attention pleasantly distracted by the occasional rustling to the ground of an early autumn leaf. I had completed part of my task, and with throbbing heart and glowing cheek I saw a large neatly-cut "F" appear on the smooth stem. Delighted beyond measure, I stood on tip-toe and touched it with my lips; then I must needs move to a distance to see the effect produced, and turning round for this purpose, I saw—oh! who would believe it? almost close behind me, the object of

my thoughts,—Frank Innes! looking at me with his whole soul in his face, and an expression in his eyes which told plainly that he understood well what I was about.

I put my hands upon my glowing face and tried to think what I should do. My first impulse was to run away, and without thinking of its folly I attempted to spring past Frank who was standing right before me. But, anticipating this movement, he put out his arm, caught my dress, and said, "Cecile, why will you fly from me? I have not seen you for many, many months. I only reached Dunearn this morning, and learning you were here I came out at once; I have been searching for you during the last hour, and now I have found you, you are going to run away!" And his mobile features assumed an expression so sad that every fibre of my heart was wrung.

Had I loved him less it is possible I might have answered bitterly, for anger, at the very awkward position in which I had placed myself, was still surging in my heart; as it was, however, I only turned my head aside and burst into tears.

Frank was alarmed, "Cecile, dearest, darling Cecile!" he exclaimed, "what is wrong? what have I done?"

I did not attempt to answer him; indeed, I could not; I only tried to repress the hysterical sobs which were getting worse and worse.

"Cecile, you are ill! Yes, they told me you

were ill! What madness in me to surprise you so suddenly!" said Frank, in a tone of self-reproach.

I made an effort, and held out my hand, "O, Frank! you will think me very foolish; but I can't help it; I shall soon be better now. Believe me, I am very glad to see you—very." I was regaining command over myself, and continued, smiling through my tears, "But you should not have taken me quite by surprise, sir."

"Yes, I confess I was wrong; but if you knew the pleasure I experienced during the ten minutes I stood watching you, you would forgive me at once."

"I have nothing to forgive. O, Frank! how long you 've been away."

"Has it seemed long to Cecile—my own Cecile?" and he raised my hand, which he still retained, to his lips.

I blushed deeply, but I did not withdraw my hand; and contented myself with saying, with as much sauciness as I could assume, "Who told you I was your own Cecile?"

"Nobody; I dreamt it, perhaps; or," and a roguish expression filled the merry blue eye as he glanced at the tree, "perhaps I imagined it; but it does not signify if I am right. Am I right Cecile?"

I shook my head; but I smiled and looked up at him. The answer seemed satisfactory, for he immediately said, "Will you sit down here," and

he pointed to the short, smooth turf, "while I finish your task."

"Task! what task?" I cried as I saw him approaching the tree. "No, no, no, you must not do that; you don't know what I was going to do!"

"Perhaps not; but I know what I am going to do. I used to be a capital engraver on wood. Won't you give me an opportunity of shewing you my skill?" He spoke very quietly, but the roguish expression still continued dancing in his eyes.

"You provoking creature! I shan't look at you," said I, pouting.

"Well, don't; just sit down for five minutes. I have ever so many things I am dying to tell you, but I've set my heart on doing this first."

And he begun. I was as good as my word, I did not look at him, but stood with my back leaning against the tree looking far away on the distant landscape. After what seemed to me only a few minutes, he said, "There now; come and tell me what you think of my carving powers."

I glanced towards the tree, and there beautifully cut in German characters I saw "Cecile Raye" forming a sort of circle round my great clumsy "F." "It's very pretty and very nice," I said, with cheeks all glowing; "but what made you go and do that; every body will see it; and oh, Frank! I wish you would try and scrape out that —that great clumsy—thing," and I pointed with my finger to the F.

"That, Cecile! I would not scrape *that* out for the world! And as to the other, I would'nt care though every body saw it; nor need you, it's a very pretty name to look at, I assure you. But won't you sit down a little; the grass is not damp is it?"

"Oh no," I said, seating myself. Then the young man flung himself down full length at my feet, and looked up towards me with looks—well I can't exactly describe them; but they were very kind, earnest looks, so earnest that it was only by stealth I ventured to meet his eyes at all, occupying myself, for the most part, with admiring and turning over and over a withered leaf which I had picked off the ground!

To record our conversation would be folly. The young, the romantic, and the enthusiastic, will guess it; others seared by wisdom, and steeped in the matter-of-fact spirit of the world would laugh at it, or call it "bosh." The only thing in our conversation that would interest them was the information Frank gave me that he had written to his father, had been reconciled to him, and had received his consent to continue in the profession he had chosen, at least in the meantime. But if truth must be told, this information so important to Frank's happiness and future wellbeing, gave me very little concern. Far from taking advantage of the favourable moment to make inquiry concerning his father, I don't think I cared just at

that precise instant whether he had a father, or ever had one. Frank himself was enough, ay and more than enough,—to know that he was beside me, after our long separation, to hear his musical voice once more, and to look, even by stealth, into his merry blue eyes.

Yes, doubt it not, we were happy as we lingered under that ancient beech, with the blue sky above, the softly misty landscape in the distance, the pleasant breath of the dying summer on our cheeks, the music of the bubbling brook in our ears, and above all, beyond all, love, *first* love in our hearts!

"In bliss beyond compare" we lingered on till the westering sun warned us of day's decline. Then turning my head in a homeward direction, I caught a glimpse of a white-robed figure wandering backwards and forwards among the trees. After looking at her an instant, I said, "Frank, if I'm not mistaken, that's Aggie; what can have brought her here?"

"Dear me, how stupid! I ought to have told you that she came out with me to shew me the way. The sweet little thing; do you know Cecile, next to you I think her the prettiest, nicest little girl in the world. She should have been my fate, should not she," continued he, smiling, "seeing I pulled her out of the water?"

"*Selon au règle*," I replied, rising and shaking from my muslin dress the morsels of the withered

leaf, which after examining sufficiently, I had broken into atoms. "Perhaps," and sighing a little sigh at the termination of a pleasure which even then I knew could never be repeated, I added, "She is a dear, good, sweet girl; let us go to her."

After our sisterly greetings were over, something in Aggie's manner struck me as peculiar, she rather avoided meeting my eyes, turning away or looking to the ground when she spoke or when I addressed her; and she talked quickly and about everything in an incoherent style, very different from her usual lady-like composure. I was too happy, however, to pay much attention to her, and ere we reached the old farm-house Aggie and her peculiar manner were forgotten.

CHAPTER X.

A Mother's Prayer.

AGGIE and Frank returned to town that evening, and the next day I spent in a state of "fidgets" almost unbearable. "Would he come back to-day?" I asked myself again and again. I almost hoped it, though I knew it was unlikely. I spent the whole forenoon in pacing up and down the approach, and in running up occasionally to a window in the gable of the house, which commanded the road leading to Dunearn for nearly a mile, making myself believe, only to renew disappointment on disappointment, that I saw his figure in the distance. Then the afternoon I spent under the beech tree examining the newly made cuttings, rubbing them over with soil to dull their freshness, and starting and looking round at every trifling sound, at every rustling leaf. But he did not come! Then I got angry and unreasonable,

and felt sure he did not love me! And in this, by no means pleasant humour, I strolled homewards, contrasting bitterly my walk of this evening with that of the past; and in this certainly there were other elements at work than imagination, for the weather had changed suddenly, as, in its caprice, it often does at that season of the year. The blue sky had become gray—leaden-coloured gray; and soughing winds, cold and chill, were moaning through the trees and driving autumn leaves before them. My thin muslin dress was a poor protection in such an evening, and shivering I hastened onwards. The evening passed in contriving excuses, and manufacturing reasons, for returning to Dunearn on the morrow; while, with head buried in a large folio of travels, I was pretending to read; and next morning at breakfast, much to the astonishment of my uncle and aunts, I announced my intention of doing so, assigning at the same time an excuse so paltry that I blushed when I gave it. Indeed, I suspect my aunts, who still retained a spice of romance in their nature, had a pretty correct guess of the real state of the case, for Aunt Mary immediately said, with the slightest possible touch of sarcasm in her voice, "I wonder how long that nice looking sailor will stay? I daresay we'll see you back when he goes away!"

"O, Aunt Mary, how can you say such a thing!" I exclaimed, colouring with vexation; "I'm sure Frank Innes has nothing to do—" I stopped

abruptly; foolish though I was, I could not make up my mind to tell a falsehood; and was not prepared to endorse the statement "that all is fair in love and war." But while I remained with head buried in my cup to conceal my blushes, and tears just ready to start to my eyes, kind Uncle Charlie came to my relief, saying, "Let her alone, poor thing, we were a' young ourselves once; and we must never forget the claim Frank Innes has on our gratitude, and specially on Cissy's, who loves her little Aggie dearly."

"Yes, most dearly; I think I could almost die for her," said I, raising my eyes to my uncle's face, with looks which I strove to render full of thanks.

He understood them, and continued, "Aggie reminds me more of your mother when she was a girl than any of you, only she has a finer skin; but in manner and everything else she is just her over again. As for you, you great tall thing, I don't know anybody you are like!" he added smiling.

"I am like you, Uncle Charlie," I cried gaily; and under cover of the general laugh that followed, I got up and left the room.

When I returned some time after, fully equipped for my journey, Uncle Charlie, who never lingered long at the breakfast table, had gone out, and my aunts had set about their household duties. I went in search of them to say "good bye." "So you *are* going!" cried Aunt Mary, whom I found

first. And she called into an adjoining room, "Marget, Marget, here's Cissy, she is going off!"

"What nonsense," said she; coming out as she spoke; "I thought the lassie was haverin'."

"Oh, but I'm in earnest," said I, kissing her. "Good bye, Aunt Margaret, I'll soon be out again."

"Yes, when Frank Innes goes away," said Aunt Mary, with a malicious twinkle of the eye.

"Perhaps before," I replied with self-command, which astonished myself. "Frank said he would like to come back; perhaps I'll bring him. Good bye, Aunt Mary." And kissing her I was gone.

I was very proud of myself, and walked majestically down the avenue; and then, as I turned into the public road, other thoughts crowded into my mind. I thought of what I had said about Aggie in the morning, "that I could die for her," and assured myself that I had spoken the truth. Slight as the difference was between our ages, the difference in our characters was so great that something almost of the love of a mother mingled in my affection for her. She in a great degree had filled up the blank in my heart caused by the sudden loss of baby Charlie, and until I met Frank every longing affection had been satisfied in her. And now for more than a year I had scarcely thought of Aggie in her sweet simplicity. Was it possible that she had discovered this alienation, this infidelity of heart to her? I could not believe it, for in manner I had even been more tender towards

her than usual. Ah, how often we try to compensate with lip-worship for the devotion which we are conscious has fled from our heart! But if she had not discovered my infidelity (this was the strong name I gave it to myself), how was I to account for her extraordinary change of manner? For extraordinary it was; and the more I allowed my mind to dwell upon it, the more extraordinary it appeared. That Aggie should be constrained in my presence, that she should avert her eyes, those soft, hazel eyes which used so lovingly to watch my face, and interpret its every expression, was something I could not understand.

In trying to read this enigma, and in anticipating the pleasure of soon seeing Frank again, I walked on, scarcely noticing the lovely river sparkling in the sunlight, enlivened by the boats of fishermen, small trading vessels, and a river steamer or two, on the one side; nor on the other, the lofty hills wooded almost to the tops, and presenting almost every shade of gold, green, russet, and brown. Nor did I heed the various conveyances which from time to time either out-stripped or dashed past me; the swift "Defiance" with its four spanking horses, its jolly looking driver, and its outside loaded with travellers; the aristocratic chariot with its luxurious lollers, and the humble slow-going farmer's cart with its one stout, lazy horse, and its plough-boy asleep on the top of its load, which all, on former occasions, would have

been to me, in their different styles, rich and entertaining subjects of meditation, now created scarcely a passing thought; and it was not till I was entering the suburbs of the town that my attention in this way was roused even for an instant. But here it certainly was roused, for on turning rather a sudden bend of the road, I saw approaching at full speed a very dashing equipage, which was meant to be striking. It was a kind of dog-cart, with two splendid horses driven *tandem*, and a little boy, grotesquely dressed up as a tiger, blowing a horn. It would have been impossible for any one, however *distrait*, to have allowed it to pass without noticing it. So look I did as it passed, but my eyes were as quickly cast to the ground again; for three fashionable-looking young men, who were packed in it, instantly raised their hats and saluted me with mock gravity; and as, with cheeks burning and heart indignant, I hurried onwards, I heard my name distinctly mentioned, with remarks which from other lips might have been termed flattering. "Insulting," however, was the term I applied to them; and mentally adding, "Some of these wild officers!" I did not slacken my pace till I found myself tripping up the hall steps, passing through the open door, and standing in the parlour in the presence of my mother.

She uttered a slight exclamation of surprise, and said, "Have you come back, Cecile?"

"Yes, mamma," I replied, kissing her; "I am quite well, and—"

"And I suppose you were longing to see us all again," said my mother, kindly ending my sentence for me.

"Yes, that is to say, not exactly," said I, blundering and hesitating. "But where's Aggie? where's Susie? where's—"

"Frank Innes and Aggie are in the garden," said my mother, answering my last question first, and laying, I thought, unnecessary stress upon the first name, "and Susie's gone to school."

"To school! Oh yes, I forgot, school is open again now."

"You seem a little confused this morning," said my mother, as I was leaving the room, somewhat hurriedly. "Sit down and rest a little after your long walk, and tell me how your aunts and uncle are."

My mother spoke quietly, but there was in her voice a tone of command which I felt no inclination to disobey. "You look flushed," she continued, as, undoing my bonnet-strings, I sat down on the sofa. "Has anything happened to annoy you?"

"Not much," I answered; and then, glad of the excuse to conceal my nervous excitement, I related the little incident of the dog-cart.

I was not prepared, however, for the effect the recital produced on my mother. She bent her head forward, shaded her eyes with her hand, and remained silent a few moments. I could see she was

endeavouring to regain composure, for she trembled violently. At last she said, "Cecile, my darling Cecile! what have you done to attract the attention of such men? Oh, Cecile, it would break my heart to think that, by look or deed, you gave them any encouragement! Assure me, my daughter, on this point: have you ever seen or spoken to any of these men before?"

"Seen them often, but spoken to them—never!" and my lip curled. "Mamma, what do you take me for?"

She looked at me; "Cecile, you must not be angry. I should have warned you of this before. If you had only known the fearful wrecks that I have seen among my school companions, and all beginning in incidents not more important than what you have told me to-day! Oh, Cecile, the bare idea seems as if it would kill me! rather, ten thousand times rather, would I see you in the grave beside our baby Charlie than——" She stopped abruptly; sobs choked her utterance.

I wept too; such emotion is infectious; and although I could not comprehend her meaning entirely, still, from the stock of worldly knowledge I had learned from Georgina Macduff, I was able to catch a glimpse of her meaning, and did my best to assure, soothe, and calm her. I told her, what you know, that I had never wasted a thought on any of the gay young men and officers with which the town swarmed. This she did not doubt, but

she added, "My darling child, my precious Cecile, you don't know them. When once they set their eyes on a young girl, as they have done on you, they leave nothing undone to accomplish her ruin; and this ruin they look upon as a victory, as something to be boasted of in their midnight carousals."

"But, mamma, are they all wicked,—all?"

"I'm afraid the great majority are," replied my mother. "We must not limit the grace of God, and there have been some brilliant exceptions; but these shining lights have only served to render the great mass more conspicuous in their gross wickedness and open disregard for God and his law. Oh, Cecile, you must give me a solemn promise that you will never hold, with one of them even, the most trifling intercourse. Promise me, my child."

I was astonished, almost alarmed, at my mother's eagerness, nevertheless I promised. It cost me nothing then. She then said, "Thank you, my child. Oh let us ask God to give us strength to resist all temptation, and keep us ever near to himself!" And falling on her knees, as I immediately did also, she poured out a prayer on my behalf, which I never, never forgot; and she finished by imploring God, the God of my fathers, to place his seal upon my forehead, that when unseen dangers and temptations might arise, the world might know that I was His.

Little did mother or daughter dream at that hour how that prayer was to be answered!

CHAPTER XI.

Won't you wish me Joy, my little Sister?

THE days now flew rapidly; Frank's fortnight of leave was almost expired, and what was gone of it had been spent in the pleasantest manner, with, so far as I myself was concerned, two little drawbacks: one, Aggie's changed behaviour to myself; and the other, the perpetual gloom which hung on Robert's brow. In my happiness, I made many an effort to lighten it, but without effect; indeed such efforts rather had the effect of increasing it, and of making him appear, if possible, more disagreeable; for they were invariably repulsed by, "Mind your own business, you saucy thing," or by other remarks equally polite, at which I was compelled to laugh, if I did not wish to shew myself annoyed. Frank used to call him "Poor old crusty Bob," and to laugh at him somewhat unmercifully. How would he have acted in the same situation?

Every morning my father, before going out, used to ask Frank to ride out with him, or walk down to the harbour, or go somewhere or other that he thought would interest him; and every morning, for the first week of his stay, did my heart throb, waiting for his answer; but a polite declinature to my father, and a merry glance of his eye to me, quickly set my heart at rest again. Then my father, throwing the *Times* to him, would good-humouredly call him a "lazy dog," and take his departure.

Our plans for the day then began in earnest; our morning walks, our afternoon readings, and our musical soirées. At these Georgina Macduff always regularly assisted, and as she had a good voice, and sang a second well, she was always welcome. Frank and she carried on at the same time an undisguised flirtation, compliments passing and repassing continually between them. Was I not jealous? *I!* certainly not; no more jealous than a lovely and loving bride, secure in her husband's love, would feel at seeing him flirt with her dearest friend. I don't believe that jealousy is a necessary attendant on love; but, on the contrary, that where *true* love is, jealousy cannot exist. But in this world, love, alas! like other good things, has many counterfeits.

On the day before he left, Frank proposed to walk out to Rosedean; and I, willing to keep my bravado promise to my aunts, gladly seconded the

proposal. Aggie agreed to it at once; indeed, her sweet yielding will never for one instant opposed itself to ours. We were soon ready. Autumn dresses of soft silken plaid, and straw bonnets trimmed with crimson velvet, had replaced the muslins and pink-ribboned hats of summer. We were, like most young girls, pleased with our new dresses, and; if truth must be told, pretty well pleased with ourselves.

Aggie, I had never seen look so beautiful since the eventful morning of our strange pleasure trip; the soft crimson velvet suited well the delicate cheek and the dark-brown hair. I kissed her, and she returned my embrace with less reserve than usual. Very different was our walk out this morning from my solitary walk into town a fortnight ago. Every object now was noticed and chatted over. The river and its boats suggested to our minds the "Bride of the Ocean," Frank's floating home which he loved with the tenderness sailors often have for their ships; and he spoke of her with so much affection, of the beautiful way she behaved in a bit of a storm which took place off the Cape, and told us how pleasantly the voyage was spent, that my eye sparkled, and my cheek glowed. Looking down to me he said, somewhat suddenly, and in a low tone of voice, "You would like to go with me to-morrow, Cecile?"

"With you? Oh yes!"

His smile and his look of gratitude told me what

I had done. I coloured, but I did not wish it undone. And then Frank went on gayer than ever. "As soon as he knew his profession thoroughly," he said, "his father would give him a ship of his own, and then he would take his wife with him, and they would sail up the Mediterranean, and visit the towns renowned in story; and on the lovely moon-lit sea his wife (how my heart throbbed at the word) would lie on the deck with her *golden* curls making a lustre around her, while he would touch the light guitar."

"The guitar? Can you play the guitar?"

"Oh, yes! there is not much playing about it; but it does very well for an accompaniment."

"Your wife must sing, then!"

"Of course," replied he, "*she sings* like a nightingale."

"Sings? then you have one already?"

"In imagination; O, Cecile! yes."

And Aggie walked on smiling and quiet; looking at the hills, the fields, the river, at everything except us!

So we reached the old farm-house. My aunts, my uncle welcomed us; welcomed him with the utmost kindness. They listened to him, when he spoke, with deference, and my uncle even asked his opinion of some things he had seen in his travels! Yes, it was easy to see that they liked him; but no wonder, I thought, who would not like Frank?

After dinner, we walked to a spot which, in-

teresting before, I now looked upon as sacred: the mound where grew the old beech tree.

Frank shewed Aggie my name; she admired it exceedingly, and then examined it curiously. "Who made that F?" at last she asked with some hesitation.

"Nobody, nobody!" answered Frank quickly; "a freak of nature, I assure you."

Aggie looked, as well she might, incredulous, and lifted her great hazel eyes to my face for explanation. For the first time in my life my eyes fell beneath her's; and my cheeks glowed, but, nevertheless, I answered her look, and said, with as much calmness as I could assume, "I made it, Aggie; isn't it an ugly thing?"

"*You* made it?" An extraordinary expression flitted across her face. She looked first at Frank and then at me; a hysterical sob burst from her mouth, and with quivering lips she added, "Then you two are engaged?"

I was silent, but Frank immediately replied, "Well, Aggie, I suppose that is the plain English of it. Won't you wish me joy, my little sister?"

But Aggie, whose pretty, pale face was now the battle-field of contending emotions, answered him not. The next instant, however, she flung herself into my arms exclaiming, "O, Cecile!"

I drew her face close to mine, and kissed her. It was cold—very cold; but there were no traces of tears. To change the subject I said, "Aggie,

come and sit down for a minute and Frank will cut out yours too; you see he can do it nicely."

But she drew herself out of my arms, and, almost with a shriek, exclaimed, "Mine? never—never! Him? never—never!" And bursting into tears, she almost fell to the ground. I sat down beside her, threw my arms round her waist, and endeavoured to soothe her. This was the crowning point of Aggie's inexplicable behaviour; and however much I longed to ask her the cause of it all, I could not with Frank at my side.

As soon as we thought her sufficiently composed; and, to do her justice, the poor little thing struggled hard to be so, we walked slowly back to the house, hoping great results from a warm cup of tea.

She did look better after it; and as we had some miles to walk, it was necessary to set out immediately. My aunts and I tried to prevail on Aggie to spend the night at Rosedean, but she was resolute. "She was better, quite better, now," she said; "and if she stayed, mamma would be so anxious, and think her worse than she was." (There was something in this.) No, she would go, and the sooner, she thought, the better.

And so we three retraced the well-known road, but with feelings how different to those of the morning!

CHAPTER XII.

Farewell! Oh, Farewell!

THAT night as I lay awake in the moonlight, too happy to sleep, I was startled by a low moan from Aggie. Turning and putting my arms round her, I was shocked to find that she was very cold. "Aggie," I whispered, "are you ill? You are quite cold my dear little sister!" and I began chafing her hands in mine. She buried her head in my bosom; but she did not reply.

"Aggie," I again said, "you are either very ill, or something is vexing you very much; won't you tell your own Cecile?" and I kissed her.

She began to tremble; but still she remained silent.

Becoming seriously alarmed, I withdrew my arms, and was on the point of springing from bed, in order to summon assistance, when she clutched my night-dress suddenly, and said in a piteous tone, "O, Cecile, don't leave me; don't go away."

"I'm not going, Aggie dear; I shall just ring and get a light, and we shall see what is wrong."

But she held me tighter. "No, no don't; there's nothing wrong. Come close to me and I will tell; but you won't despise me Cecile, will you, your poor foolish Aggie? Oh, how I despise myself!"

"No Aggie, no; how could you fancy such a thing?" and I put my arms round her once more, and drew her head on my shoulder. Then I whispered, "Now, Aggie darling, what is it? You will feel better when you tell me; I know you will." And by dint of entreaties I drew from the poor child a confession, which possibly you may anticipate; but which to me was unexpected—most fearfully unexpected. Oh, how glad I was, even in the midst of my anguish and misery, that it was dark, or at least that the flickering rays of the moon were not sufficient to betray the expression of my face; for though I had control enough to prevent the trembling of my limbs, over the muscles of my countenance I felt I had no command! But you will judge of my feelings better than I can describe them when I say that from Aggie's lips at that silent midnight hour, I learned that she loved Frank; ay, and had loved him from the very first moment she saw him; for with many sobs and much hesitation she told me all: how she had loved him all along in spite of the constant efforts she had made to subdue her love; and I

it was to watch his "bonny" bright face, which she noticed almost as soon as she set her foot on board the "Bride of the Ocean," that she had gone, poor simple child, to sit behind the cabin door on that memorable 3d of July! And after she had told me all this, the poor little thing, who was weeping freely now, added, "And, oh Cecile, I know I have been very, very wicked, for since that day I have often often wished I had been drowned! I fear God will never forgive me."

"Oh yes, Aggie dear, we must trust to His mercy; *He will not break the bruised reed;* but why, my own Aggie, did you allow such a dreadful thought to come into your mind?"

"Need you ask, Cecile; I very soon saw that Frank loved my tall, golden-haired sister, and not poor, pale, little Aggie; but indeed," she continued meekly, "I never expected him to love me, I only thought of loving him without anybody ever knowing anything about it; and it was not till—till I saw how happy, how very happy, you both were in loving each other, that I began to long to be loved, just a very little, too. Pardon me, my own sister," she continued deprecatingly, "if I wronged you by this wish; none know how I have suffered, how I have struggled against it."

"Yes, Aggie, I know; many things I could not understand are now explained. But rest assured of this, that Frank loves you not a very little, but a great deal, and will love you more yet I know

for certain. There, you are better now," I added in a cheering tone of voice, "I knew you would be when you made me your father-confessor; but you must sleep now; come, let me kiss you, and then I shall sing a soothing lullaby, shall I?" And kissing her several times I placed her head gently on her pillow; for on my shoulder I could bear it no longer; it felt like a great weight of lead, and the sort of supernatural strength which had supported me was fast going.

After a minute's silence, she spoke again; "Cecile you are very, very good; I have not vexed you, have I?"

"No, no, dearest; do try and sleep; it's all right, Aggie." But no sooner had I said so than I mentally ejaculated, "May heaven forgive me! surely if ever end justified the means, such is the case now."

For nearly an hour I lay very still and quiet, waiting and watching till my sister slept. For sometime she sobbed hysterically, then she was calm, and by and by I heard her soft, regular breathing, and knew that sleep, "kind nature's sweet restorer," had fallen with its soothing poppies on her exhausted frame.

And then I moved softly aside and clutched the pillow in my agony.

Yes, in my agony! in agony such as those of keen spirit and indomitable will only can feel. I had no doubts, no misgivings then, as to my course or my duty. My path was clear, conscience's

verdict emphatic: "Give up Frank." There was no choice, no alternative. Did I ask it? did I wish it? Not then. But how to do it, how to tear that loving heart. "Oh why," I could not help asking myself, "is this fearful ordeal laid upon me?" Had I been torn from him by death, or separated by some accident over which I had no control, it would have been sweet compared to this. *This*, being compelled to stab his heart with my own hand, and with my own hand to bind upon the altar my happiness, my life, my love, my idol! But it must be done; there was no help, and it seemed no hope of happiness was now possible for me. My heart was to be immolated; and no Hindoo girl in the grief of her widowhood,—no fair virgin consecrated to appease, with her sweet young blood, the offended gods of her country,—was more anxious for the completion of the sacrifice. How long that night seemed,—how long it seems even now when I look back upon it,—but morning came at last. The dawn broke gray and drizzly, suitable enough to the state of my mind, to which neither morn nor night could henceforth bring happiness. The moment daylight appeared, I rose, dressed, and took my seat at the window, and, with crossed hands pressed tight on my breast, gazed out on—vacancy; for though the window commanded a view of the park, the river, and the lofty mountains beyond, I saw nothing, and heeded not what in other circumstances would

have gratified my taste for nature in its grandeur—the great masses of mist rolling down, or breaking upon the mountains.

By and by Aggie got up; she had slept well and looked refreshed. A singular charm Aggie possessed in this, that her face never retained for any time traces of tears or emotion. As some lovely lake lashed into fury by a sudden gust from the mountains will, almost as soon as the storm has passed, resume its sleeping beauty, so Aggie, notwithstanding the mental storm of the past night, looked composed, calm, almost angelic, in the sweetness of her childlike beauty. I watched her with something akin to pleasure at the various duties of her toilette; then after she had combed and brushed out her long hair, and was to gather it up as usual into a knot behind, I rose, went up to her, and said, "Stop Aggie, I must do your hair for you to-day; you never do those heavy brown masses justice, sister mine."

"Thank you Cecile dear, you are the best and kindest of sisters; I hope you'll never think any any more about what I told you last night. I'm sure I'll learn in time to be happy in seeing you both happy; don't you think so Cecile?"

"Think so! think what?" Then suddenly remembering the words which had passed through my preoccupied brain, I continued, "Yes, yes, it will be all right, Aggie; you'll be happy in loving, and being beloved by Frank."

A vivid blush coloured her cheek at the name; but she did not, I think, fully comprehend my meaning, for she smiled and said, "And you Cecile?"

"Oh never fear for me: I shall be happy too!" I answered gaily; and perfectly astonished at my own powers of acting, I continued in the same light tone, "I think I shall go on the stage; I have a notion I would make a good actress."

Aggie opened her large hazel eyes very wide, and looked at me as if she thought I was going mad.

Was I mad? well it did not much signify; there's more madness in the world than we know, or perhaps would care to know.

The brown hair was now arranged to my satisfaction. I had brushed it all back from her face, uncovering the exquisitely white temples and the small pearl-like ear; I had parted it into numerous plaits which I disposed in a style which I had seen and admired in a pretty French crayon: binding them all together, and forming a sort of coronet with one long glossy plait, which I had reserved for the purpose; and then holding up a small hand glass in the position where she could best see her head, I said, "Now, Aggie, look!"

She was very much pleased, I could see, before she exclaimed, "How very nice; how very, very pretty!"

"You like it, Aggie? I was sure you would:

it's quite a success. Instead of being an actress, I think I shall apply for the situation of hair-dresser to our bonnie young Queen!"

Again Aggie looked questioningly at me, but I heeded her not. "Now what dress are you going to wear: not that ugly thing surely?" seeing her lay her hand on a grey de-laine which was hanging near.

"Ugly! What do you mean, Cecile? It's the same as yours, and you are wearing it now!"

"Oh me! never mind me; it would be all very well for a sunny day; but just look at the morning. Come, as I have dressed your hair, I must select your dress;" and opening the wardrobe, which was our common property, I took out a crimson French merino, very soft and fine in its texture, and made her put it on. Then I examined her appearance carefully, arranged the narrow trimming of Valenciennes lace which finished the tight-fitting body at the throat, gave a few finishing touches to the graceful folds, and my work was done. But no, not quite yet. I suddenly remembered that Frank was very fond of a certain perfume I sometimes used, and taking from my mouchoir-case one of the whitest and most delicate of my handkerchiefs (I was dainty on this point), I sprinkled it with this perfume. I put it into the pocket of her dress; then I surveyed her once more, and my critical taste being satisfied, I said, "There, you will do now; you may go."

"And you, Cecile, are you not coming?"

"Yes, in a minute or two, love; run away, do!"

Marvellous that she did not catch the tone of suppressed agony in these words! But she did not, and left the room quietly, without even looking behind her.

I waited till she shut the door, and then I threw an agonized glance round the room, looking in vain for some opening chasm where I might fling myself, and disappear for ever! Then my eye fell on the glass before which I was still standing. Haggard and worn, my face, in its ashy paleness, was but a shade lighter than the gray dress I wore. Dull and dingy enough I looked in good truth, and it was well. Not but that I would have garlanded myself with flowers, as victims of old, for the sacrifice, but, alas, alas, there was another! Oh, light comparatively would my sacrifice have been if I could have borne it alone! but I could not, I could not! and as I still stood thinking of him—of him! the breakfast bell rang.

When the soul is in agony, how the ordinary duties of life distract and madden; breakfast, dinner, tea, bells, dressing and undressing, all those trifling minutiæ which go to make up the sum of our earthly existence, how we wish they were annihilated! Oh if I could then have been left alone with my misery! but this was impossible. Drawing my hand hastily over my dishevelled hair, I went down stairs. Frank started when he saw

me; but immediately a sudden expression of tenderness came to his face, and he whispered, "A year will soon pass, Cecile, and then we shall meet again!"

It was evident that he misinterpreted, or rather, I should say, put a natural construction on my ashy face. Poor fellow, how to undeceive him!

Breakfast passed, and I watched, but watched in vain, for an opportunity of speaking to Frank by himself. I never thought of this difficulty, nor did I remember that it was only by the rarest chance that he and I were ever alone. There was no what might be termed love-making in our case; no getting into solitary corners; no stealing out on moon-lighted balconies; no secluding ourselves in arbours; no, we lived, moved, and breathed in the family circle; we engaged in the duties, the pastimes, and the pleasures of the house, and, meanwhile, our young hearts throbbed and beat with a love which, like a beautiful spring, refreshed and gladdened all around!

On this day, then, when it was so vital that I should have a few minutes' private conversation with Frank, it seemed impossible. The state of the weather confined us to the house, for torrents of rain, and howling gusts of wind, had been the sequel of the gray, drizzling, misty morning. My mother sat at her knitting in her easy chair, wheeled up to the fire; Aggie employed herself on a piece of handsome embroidery; Frank amused

himself drawing on paper, and cutting out horses and carriages for little Jim; and I wandered about very restless, looking out at the window, trying to admire Frank's horses, watching Aggie as she stole furtive glances at him, or sat with her long lashes casting a shadow on her soft cheek. Never did I think her more lovely. Vivid blushes chased each other over her face, and the consciousness of her secret being known even by me, gave to her an expression of deprecating timidity which was very charming. Oh, if Frank would see her with my eyes!

Time went on, and, notwithstanding the rain, Georgina Macduff came in to bid a fussy farewell to Frank. Noisy and demonstrative as she always was, I thought her particularly so to-day, and, but for appearing rude, I would have put my hands to my ears, to prevent the sound of her lively chit-chat from penetrating into my tortured brain. She wished Frank "a pleasant voyage" a hundred times over, and did not stir till dinner was announced.

It was now two o'clock; Frank must go at six. I became desperate. So, under pretext of helping to clear away his paper-cuttings before going in to dinner, I got close to him, and said,

"Frank, I must see you alone for a few minutes before you go; will you meet me after dinner in the garden arbour?"

"Certainly, Cecile, yes." And an expression

so full of bright joy appeared on his face, that my heart bled to see it. Little did he dream of the object of our meeting.

Immediately after dinner I rose and went down the long wet gravel walk to the arbour. A tasteful and pretty enough little spot was this arbour on a fine day, with its trellis work covered with clematis, jessamine, and climbing roses; but now, with its benches saturated, and pools of water gradually increasing on its fantastic round table from its dripping foliage, a more dismal, dreary place could scarcely be conceived. It was well I had chosen it, because on such a day, and in such circumstances, it was most unlikely that our *tête a tête* should be interrupted.

I had not waited many minutes when Frank rushed in, panting, breathless, dripping, and commenced immediately to shake off the wet from his coat. I, concealed in a shady angle, was not seen at first; but no sooner did his eye get accustomed to the obscurity than he perceived me and exclaimed, "Why, you are here, Cecile! Don't you think you've been happy in your selection of a meeting place? I think I would have managed better myself; but why, what is wrong with my Cecile?" he continued, suddenly changing his tone of playful irony to one of the utmost tenderness, "You must not look so miserable because I am forced to go away, or else you will make me miserable too."

"O, Frank!" I exclaimed impetuously, "don't say that; I would die to save you from misery; to spare you a single pang; O, Frank!" And I gasped, as if for breath.

He looked amazed and distressed beyond measure, and then coming close up to me, he slipped his arm round my waist as if to support me, for he saw that I was sinking to the ground, and said, "Cecile, Cecile! there is something dreadful under all this; something I can't understand. O, Cecile, I entreat, I conjure you to tell me all—the worst!"

"The worst, Frank," I said, releasing myself gently but firmly from his encircling arm, "is that we must part."

"Yes, Cecile," he interrupted quickly, "but by the blessing of heaven we shall meet again; and then the meeting: oh the rapture, the bliss! Cecile don't you know that every month, every year, brings the time nearer when I shall be able to call you mine for ever!"

I bent my head; the blood rushed to my wan cheeks. "Yes, I have thought of that; pardon, forgive what I must say Frank; when we part now it must be for ever—or at least till—"

"Till what?" exclaimed the young man, "No power on earth; nothing but the assurance from your own lips that you have ceased to love me, can ever part us, Cecile!" Then watching the fluctuating expression of my face, he added tenderly, "Is it not so, Cecile?"

Fain would I have whispered "Yes;" but it must not be; even now I felt I was rapidly losing ground, and summoning all my remaining fortitude to my assistance, I said, "No Frank, it is not so; from this moment when we say farewell, we must never meet again till—till we can love each other, regard each other, as brother and sister, and nothing more." I spoke rapidly, terrified that Frank should again interrupt me. But it was not necessary, he seemed paralysed; and it was some time before he said,

"Then, Cecile, I'm to understand that you have ceased to love me!"

"To love you! O, Frank, don't be cruel; you know at this moment I would die for you; oh, if I could but die!"

"Cecile, you will drive me mad!" I heard no more, a sudden rushing of the blood to my head, a sudden ringing in my ears, a sudden darkening of my eyes, and I became unconscious.

How long I remained in this swoon I cannot tell, but not more, I should think, than a minute or two, for when I recovered, I was on the spot where I had sunk, only Frank was kneeling beside me, tenderly supporting my head with one arm, while with the other hand he was smoothing back my hair from my brow, which was wet from the droppings of a branch which he had used to sprinkle it.

"You are better now, darling," he said, as I

opened my eyes and looked in his (oh the happiness to have died thus!). "Let me help you to a seat," and assisting me to a comparatively dry corner of the arbour, he sat down beside me, and added, "Now assure me Cecile—my own Cecile, that all that you've been saying is nothing but a horrid dream."

"I wish I could, Frank, for both our sakes; but unfortunately this dream is too true, too real." And then thinking it best to tell him the truth, I related as succinctly as possible what had happened during the past night; my decision in consequence of it; and ended by reminding him, with a faint smile, of his remark under the beech tree: "That Aggie should have been his fate."

When I was done, he looked stunned, almost stupified. At last he said, "And do you mean to say, Cecile, that, for some romantic notion of sisterly love, you would break your own heart and mine?"

"They won't break, Frank; you will be happy, oh, so happy! in loving Aggie." He shook his head, but I continued, "Yes, you will: you do not know the wealth of love treasured up in her heart, nor how fondly she will lavish it upon you. And then she is so good, and so pretty; far prettier and better than me, and—"

"O, Cecile?"

"Yes, yes it's true; and you will know it all one day, when you—will—cease—to love me."

"I never will cease to love you; so it's no use talking any more nonsense about it. Aggie will learn, must learn, to love another. Much as I like her, I cannot see that your happiness must be shipwrecked for the mere chance of securing hers."

"But it will secure hers. Answer me honestly, Frank; if I were dead, immured in a convent, or separated from you by impassable barriers, is there a girl in the world you would prefer to Aggie?"

"No, most certainly not," said Frank, without thinking of the consequences.

My heart bounded; my point was gained; I determined to spend no more time in a conversation which only softened me, and undermined the ground beneath my feet. I exclaimed, "Then, henceforth, Frank, you must think of me as one dead, as a nun, as far removed from you as one pole from another. I have vowed a vow, and cannot go back! Farewell, Frank, best beloved! Think, oh think, of Aggie!" And seizing his hand, I raised it to my lips and kissing it passionately, I swept past him like a hurricane—swept on to my room, seized my cloak and hat, and, my lips muttering mechanically, "Farewell, oh farewell!" I dashed out at the hall door, rushed across the park, in the fast-thickening twilight, and did not stop or scarcely breathe, till I stood by the side of the wildly surging river, which, suddenly swollen by mountain torrents, chafed fiercely in its channel. Wild, wicked thoughts flashed like lurid lightning

through the darkness of my despair—wild thoughts of flinging myself on its troubled waters and being at rest! But the tempter was baffled; sweet words from the grand old book came fresh to my mind. I clasped my hands on my breast, cast my eyes upward, and the danger was past. But I walked on by the side of this foaming river till twilight gloomed into night, till unstarred darkness covered the sky! On—on, my only guide the rushing river, on through marshes, over streams, till, perfectly exhausted, I sank down in a kind of stupor on a stone near its banks. The rivers, for it was at the confluence of a tributary that my wayward course had been providentially stopped, roared in my ears; rain in torrents fell pelting upon me; darkness that might be felt surrounded me! I clasped my head with my hands. "Was I mad?"

CHAPTER XIII.

The Sacrifice Completed.

THE first streaks of morning dawn appeared in the east ere I attempted to rise from the sodden ground, or remove my arms from the huge stone round which I had thrown them. Benumbed in every limb, and still in a state of semi-consciousness, I dragged my weary way homewards. How I ever reached my destination seems to me miraculous, for the fearful excitement of the previous night left me now so fearfully prostrated; and every step I took seemed as if it were to be my last. But the instinct of self-preservation, for all power of reasoning seemed to have fled, carried me forward, and at last, in ghostly guise,—with my long, yellow hair hanging down dripping and dishevelled; with my garments saturated and clinging round my limbs,—I stood under my father's roof!

"Cecile, my child, my darling!" exclaimed my

mother, who met me in the hall; "where have you been? where—" But her eager, questioning look, changed to one of horror, as, essaying to speak, I glanced wildly round, and fell heavily to the ground.

A state of fierce fever, of wild delirium, succeeded this; a state in which I was utterly unconscious of anything going on around me, when day and night, hours and minutes, were to me alike. When, in a state of ecstatic bliss, I would wander hand in hand with Frank in gardens which, with their brilliant blossoms and golden fruits, a Mahommedan would have envied, listening to the murmurs of his musical voice, and feeling every pulse throb with a delight unknown to real life; or when, in an instant, I would be suddenly torn from him, and flung helpless and wretched into the midst of a seething, foaming river, the plaything and sport of every wave, and awfully conscious that I was being dragged on irresistibly to a dark, dismal chasm of boiling waters, from which no power could save me! Oh, the madness, the misery of such moments! Oh, the bliss, the love, the ecstacy of the others! Where is the man bold enough to deny the future states of heaven and hell when, even during such a short-lived fever, such transitions can take place?

Days, weeks passed in this manner; but the crisis came at last, and I was saved. Once more I saw my mother's pale, anxious face, and her soft

gray eyes gazing, oh, so tenderly! in mine; once more felt her kiss on my cheek, and heard the words, "Cecile! my darling, my first-born! God has been merciful to us. Let us bless and magnify His holy name." And my heart, at those words, rose upwards with a great bound of gratitude to the eternal throne to thank Him that I had been spared on my *mother's* account; for as yet it seemed a matter of indifference to me whether I should die or live. Weak and weary, with the pulsations of life scarcely perceptible in those veins where so lately fiery fever had run its course, I lay still on the very brink of the grave.

But days and nights of tenderest watching, days and nights of gentlest care, did not on this occasion, as, alas, they often do, go unrewarded. After many weeks of lingering weakness, I was at last permitted to leave my chamber, and once more take my accustomed place in the parlour. Then it was that I once more tasted how sweet a thing life is, and then it was I felt how hard, how very hard, it would have been to have been torn from those loved ones,—father, mother, sisters, brothers, who each and all vied with one another in acts, and words, and looks of kindness. A charm seemed to have fallen upon our home; every heart seemed enlarged, every tongue seemed to drop with love; selfishness seemed discarded, and a kind of heaven seemed to have begun on earth! This statement may appear exaggerated, but never-

theless it is true. And in no case, I believe, can affliction, however sore or grievous, be regarded as coming from a *Father's* hand without some such result following. A holy peace had fallen on my spirit, and I could now calmly look into the recesses of my heart, and discover with infinite gratitude, that no idol held a place there. I could now think, ay, and even speak of Frank without a tremour—without a blush. The sacrifice had been complete: the fever which had consumed my strength had burned up every vestige of my passionate love. And in the light of the past, how truly did I rejoice that I had been called on to make this sacrifice, how clearly did I see that, apart from Aggie, it was the best thing that could have happened for both of us; the best thing to wean us from the creature, and to teach us to love God supremely. I did hope and pray that sooner or later Frank might come to love my gentle Aggie; for in her calm, well-regulated mind there was almost a certainty of earthly love being kept in subordination to a holier and a higher; but for myself I felt that I must teach my heart to "love not," for with me love must either be worship or idolatry. And I determined that henceforth no love should hold a place in a heart which must be consecrated to the service of my God. Noble resolution, and most sincerely made; but alas, I was only a foolish impetuous girl with strong feelings, and stronger impulses, and not yet eighteen!

CHAPTER XIV.

Mrs Brodie.

MRS BRODIE was a newly-made wife, and and although her marriage had not been quite *comme il faut*, she having broken an engagement of some years' standing, to elope, on the very morning fixed for her marriage, with her present husband, still she was receiving a considerable degree of attention.

Mr Brodie was a genius, and though, as such, he was little understood, still he was wondered at and admired. A self-educated and self-made man, what was there he could not do? Ostensibly a teacher of drawing, he could, and generally did, in the capacity of private tutor, teach everything under the sun, from the classics, hoary with age, to sparkling, modern French. And then, when his day of weary toil was done, *then*, by the lingering rays of the summer sun, or the feeble light of the midnight lamp, he might still be found, still work-

ing, working on, with wondrous patience and wondrous pleasure, ever trying to realise on glowing canvass, in pale cold marble, or in burning verse, the glorious ideals which had brightened his weary hours of drudgery during the long monotonous day!

And so this man, peasant born, with his marvellous determination and patient perseverance, was slowly carving out his way to fame, if not to fortune, when chance threw in his path Isabella Stuart, a teacher like himself, penniless and—I was going to say pretty. But no, that would not do. Whatever she was, she was not pretty, nor beautiful, nor lovely. Well, I shall describe her by and by, and you may judge for yourself. Suffice to say, that Mr Brodie met this woman, decked her out in all the ideal charms of a poet's mind, and, in spite of her well-known engagement, determined to marry her. For such a man, to determine was to do. And so, when the gentleman to whom Miss Stuart had for years been engaged, having heard rumours of Mr Brodie's attentions, urged the girl on to name the day for the wedding, and had the banns published. Mr Brodie, ascertaining that he had stolen a march on him, compelled the frail Isabella (pistol in hand, it was said) to allow him to publish the banns also; and on the following Monday, many hours before the expectant bridegroom came to claim his bride, the bird had flown, and was, as we have seen, the wife of another!

Mr Brodie was poor, so the marriage trip was of short duration, and he, with his newly-made wife, soon returned to the humble home which, with his limited means, he had done his best to beautify and embellish for her reception.

Here the weeks passed in rapturous bliss: the very deed they had done, in opposition to the prescribed rules of wisdom and justice, gave, I doubt not, a certain zest to their happiness. But the world was revenged; no one called upon them; they were ostracised. Now this did not suit Mr Brodie at all. For himself he did not care. Mr Brodie, bachelor, could have lived a hermit in cave or dungeon, and been happy with his own glowing ideas, but Mr Brodie, husband, could not brook the idea that his wife was neglected; the world must see and admire the wondrous creature who had so fascinated the poet's heart! *must*. So Mr Brodie called on his numerous patrons, and, half apologetically, half humorously, with his small dark eyes twinkling mirthfully, and words of eloquent pathos gliding from his lips, confessed the wrong he had done to society by running away with one who virtually was another man's wife. But then (and the dark eye flashed) what were paltry, miserable reasons like these, when two hearts were drawn together by a magnetic spell! Was a woman like his Isabella to be chained down for life to a soulless pettifogging attorney, just because, when boy and girl at school, they had

fancied they had loved each other? And when, in answer to this appeal, prudent mammas shook their heads, and, thinking they should not like their daughters to follow such a romantic example, began to remonstrate on the necessity of preserving sacred such engagements, then the strong man almost sobbed aloud in his emotion, and the words came fast and thick in justification of his Isabella. If blame there was, he said, it attached, could attach, only to him. Up to the last moment, in opposition to the pleadings of her own heart, the poor girl had resolutely striven to fulfil her notion of duty, and it was only when with a loaded pistol he threatened to blow out his brains in her presence, that she consented to become his wife. The matrons trembled. The report was true, then, and they glanced at him suspiciously; perhaps a similar weapon was in his possession now! They began to quail under his flashing eye,—they began to sympathise with his emotion,—they began to feel the power of the determined will; and when at last he flung himself upon their pity, and implored them at least to forgive, and shew mercy, the day was his own. The respectable, fastidious matrons of Dunearn *would* "call!"

"Cecile," said my mother, after Mr Brodie had paid her a somewhat lengthened visit of explanation, in which, however, he had had the prudence to shew himself very moderate in his statements, and very apologetic in his tone, "I think there

would be no great harm in your calling on Mrs Brodie. Although I cannot sanction her conduct, still I must not be harsh nor unmerciful in judging; and I would fain hope that such an example as hers could never influence for a moment a daughter of mine."

"But, mamma," I said (for I was secretly disposed to sympathise with Mrs Brodie; and there was a dash of romance about the affair which somewhat pleased my ardent imagination), "I don't think Mrs Brodie has been so very much to blame. Have you not heard that Mr Brodie almost compelled her to marry him, and that——"

"Cecile, my daughter, let me warn you; the error lay not there, it lay in permitting, indeed I must say, encouraging Mr Brodie's attentions, when Miss Stuart knew well that she was solemnly engaged to another."

"But mamma," I persevered, "perhaps Miss Stuart did not know that Mr Brodie meant anything particular by those attentions."

"Did not know!" And my mother's soft gray eye almost flashed, "Cecile, no true-hearted woman could, for one instant, have mistaken the nature of Mr Brodie's attentions; he, in his earnest, passionate determination, could never trifle; no, no, we may pity and pardon Mrs Brodie, but we dare not attempt to justify her."

I made no other answer to this than merely asking "when I should go;" for however much *I*

might have been inclined to justify, I felt my cause was defenceless.

"You had better go at once," replied my mother, to my somewhat abrupt question. "If I were able I should accompany you; as it is, you will leave my card; and if she is at home you may ask her to fix an evening next week, when she and Mr Brodie might take tea here with a few friends."

"Very well, mamma." And I set off at once.

I found Mrs Brodie at home; but so different, so very different, from what I had pictured her, that it was with difficulty I could keep my eyes from gazing almost rudely in her face, and wondering what, in the woman before me, could have driven *two* men almost to distraction.

I had asked for Mrs Brodie, and had expected to find a beautiful woman tastefully arrayed in somewhat bridal attire. I found, in the small parlour, littered literally with books, drawings, open music, and paintings in almost every stage of progress, a young woman, plainly dressed in a cotton printed gown, not even relieved by a morsel of needlework or a scrap of edging, and which had not even the merit of fitting well; with a face which struck me as being about as plain as her gown; that is to say, with not a single feature that could be termed striking. She had a complexion of that pale olive, which often looks ill-washed; a quantity of coarse black hair, not very carefully dressed; and eyes of a very yellow gray. And this was Mrs Brodie!

I, as you may well suppose, was stiff, formal, embarrassed; she was easy, frank, composed.

Once, during my short visit, she smiled, and I caught the flash of pearly teeth; and once she sighed, and I discovered that she had long, thick, curling eye-lashes. And that was all!

After some little difficulty in finding an evening when Mr Brodie would be free from his numerous teaching engagements, for he worked, if possible, harder now than ever, Tuesday of the following week was selected, and I took my leave.

A tea-party in our house was a somewhat formidable affair. Although we scarcely ever sat down to a meal alone, yet entertainments of this kind, for which formal invitations were given, occurred only once, or at most, twice a-year. Stereotyped, therefore, though they were, for the same guests were invariably invited, we young people looked forward to them with a pleasure which might be despised, but which certainly could not be understood by the youthful votary of fashion. And then there were so many nice consultations with mamma, in which we were all allowed to take a part, as to the best kind of cake to be ordered, and the most recherché dishes for supper, and the rarest kind of fruit (on these occasions no expense was spared), that our young heads were constantly occupied; and I, from being the eldest, was kept in constant and pleasant

scheming during the whole time that elapsed between the invitations and the party.

Indeed, I made myself generally useful, and was happy to think that I saved my mother an amount of trouble, for which she had neither inclination nor strength. And it is not everybody who goes to a party, an old-fashioned middle-class party, such as ours, who knows all that is to be done ere they seat themselves in the luxurious large drawing-room, so pleasantly warm in all its recesses, so full of rich, sweet, fragrant smells, so brilliant with light reflected from fine china, and flashed back in a thousand varieties from mirrors, picture frames, shining silver, and cut crystal. Ah, hands have to be busy ere this pleasing effect is produced! Peep behind the scenes and you will see an amount of dusting and rubbing that will astonish you; watch the careful handing down of the valuable china, cup by cup, saucer by saucer, from the highest and most inaccessible shelf in the cupboard; mark the silver taken from the secret drawer, where it has lain for six months perhaps, in its tissue paper, and polished and repolished till it shines again, and then you will have an idea of how my time was spent for a few days previous to our tea-party.

It came at last, however. The preparations so soon commenced were carried on till nearly the last minute; and scarcely had my dear mother seated herself in the drawing-room, in her black

satin dress, crimson Indian crape shawl, and pretty blonde cap, tastefully trimmed with a delicate blue ribbon, than the company began to arrive. I took my station in the bed-room, to welcome the ladies there, and make myself useful in the performance of any little act of service that might be required. Such was the fashion in those days in the class of society in which I lived. Fashions have changed since then, I'm aware; but if there was less ceremony or pomp then, there was perhaps a little more kindliness.

Mrs Brodie was among the last of our lady friends to arrive. She smiled as she shook hands (I saw the flash of the pearly teeth again), and hoped she was not too late. She had waited for Mr Brodie, who had been teaching up to the last minute, and now they had hurried and walked so quickly.

Perhaps it was this quick walk through the frosty air that had produced the change I was remarking on Mrs Brodie; for, strange to say, the face from which I had turned away in distaste was almost fascinating me. As she quickly and lightly laid aside her bonnet and large loose cloak, I saw the warm blood mantling through the pale olive cheek, and the yellow eye darkening and dilating under its long thick lash; I saw the black hair, rippling in its very coarseness, taken back entirely from the face and fastened *à la Grecque* in heavy plaits behind; and this style, so odiously

unbecoming to what are called pretty faces, was singularly becoming to my new acquaintance, whom I had thought so plain. Was she plain? as she stood for an instant beside me, ere she left the room,—in her flowing, simple, crimson dress of some soft stuff, made somewhat low on the shoulder and very short in the sleeve, and simply adorned with a black lace berthe fastened with a brooch, her solitary ornament,—I asked myself this question. But whatever answer I, or any one else would have given to it, no one would have doubted the fact that she was, whether plain or not, singularly striking. While I was assisting two old ladies to disencumber themselves of their numerous wraps, and listening to their mild gossip, I was all the time thinking of the woman who had left the room, and longing to rejoin her. Was it possible that even already she was beginning to exercise an influence upon me, an influence which might tell for weal or woe on all my future life.

At last the two Misses Gray were ready, and I descended with them. Most of my old friends were there. I shook hands with our venerable clergyman, Dr Tait, who, as he well deserved, occupied the easiest chair in the cosiest corner; then with our family doctor, a little active man, who did not condescend to sit at all, but who kept moving about the room, talking to one, laughing with another, quizzing a third. Kind-hearted, and clever, and skilful, as Dr Brown was, he was

a man for whom I entertained an extraordinary dread, and I am sure I would have gone twenty miles to have avoided a *tête à tête* with him. I know girls take fancies, and this was one of them, for he was a universal favourite, though his wit was keen, and he was unmerciful in the use of this sharp two-edged weapon. Then *came* my father's man of business—a young, sharp, rising lawyer, very polite to everybody, and particularly so to me, his client's daughter. Indeed I could see that when young Mr Gordon found me a seat, and lingered standing beside me, with his fine brown eyes deferentially fixed on mine, and talking with an air of polished grace of the elegant commonplaces which are supposed to suit a woman's mind, that the older ladies smiled and looked wise, little thinking of the seared and scorched heart that dwelt within my breast. And where was Aggie, my gentle little Aggie, for whom I had so willingly made this heart sacrifice? Ah, there she was beside Mrs Brodie! her simple muslin dress and sweet pale face, with its delicate features, soft hazel eyes, and banded chesnut hair, contrasting exquisitely with the crimson-robed figure near which she nestled. How like a pure frail lily she looked; how calmly serene the expression of that fair arched brow; how holy the light in that meek eye! And then I let my eyes rest on her companion, and gazed with a species of fascination on that face, erst so plain, which something like

magic had transformed all at once into glowing voluptuous beauty: for lips of coral, cheeks of vermillion, eyes that gleamed with wild wondrous light, or rested in dreamy repose beneath their curling lashes, all were there. And gazing, I marvelled not that she had driven *two* men to her feet, but that the world in which she moved should not have fallen down and worshipped her with a passionate and sensuous worship. It is true; for in all its brilliancy Mrs Brodie's beauty was of the earth, earthy. And as once more I looked at Aggie, and compared the two faces, I turned away from the fascinating, glittering beauty, almost with a shudder.

Pleasantly passed our evening; Mrs Brodie was a host in herself. "Would she sing?" "Oh, with pleasure!" Her husband conducted her to the piano, and leaned over her with all the enthusiasm of a lover. Lightly, but powerfully, her fingers ran over the keys; a few brilliant preludes and then the rich, powerful, passionate voice burst forth in song, and, Italian though it was, every whisper was hushed, every soul spell-bound. My father at last ventured to ask, "If she could could sing a Scotch song?" "Oh yes, she loved Scotch songs." And the pearly teeth flashed as a radiant smile lit up her face, "What would you like, grave or gay?"

"Oh, onything, onything ye like, Mrs Brodie! but I fear if ye can play these Italian things so well,

ye'll mak' us greet a'thegither if ye play our waesome Scotch airs."

"No fear of that, Mr Raye. I'll make you laugh first at anyrate." So saying, she dashed off into "Duncan Gray cam' here to woo," and kept her word; for, notwithstanding the conventional rules of society, we laughed, and laughed again. But my father's prophecy was accomplished too; for, after a short pause, there came a prelude of low murmuring despair, and then she wailed forth, in wildest pathos, that exquisite ballad, "The Flowers of the Forest." Oh, cold is the heart that, almost under any circumstances, can hear that plaintive melody unmoved! but hearts of ice would have melted under Mrs Brodie's singing on that occasion.

I hovered constantly near her. I almost question if her husband felt more admiring love for her than I did. I was generally thought a first-rate musician, but how tame, how miserably tame, did my performance appear compared with hers.

Oh, what would I give to be able to sing like her! Where lay the spell? Was it in voice, in tone, in expression? While I was thinking, and wondering about the spell she possessed, and whether it was communicable, I was astonished to hear my father say,

"I'll tell you what it is, Mrs Brodie, if ye learn my lassie there to sing like that, I'll gie ye ten guineas."

Mrs Brodie smiled and said, "I will be only too happy, Mr Raye. I have too much time on my hands; and I am sure your daughter," glancing towards me as she spoke, "will prove not only an apt pupil, but a pleasant companion."

"Ay, that she will. Though I say it myself that shouldna say it, she's a gude lassie, Cecile."

After a short consultation with Mr Brodie, it was agreed that I should go on the following day to get my first lesson. And this, to me the grand event of the evening, occupied and engrossed my attention, till in due time our guests departed.

CHAPTER XV.

Dangerous Friendship.

MY singing lessons, though continued for some time, absolutely failed in their intended effect. Practise as I might, I never could sing like Mrs Brodie. Her singing was a part of herself, and, as I had feared, incommunicable. But if they failed in their intended effect, they produced the effect, which was not intended, of bringing about an intimacy, which rapidly ripened into an extraordinary, and, I may now add, dangerous friendship.

Dangerous? Yes; for it was scarcely possible to conceive a more fascinatingly dangerous companion than Mrs Brodie, to a young girl who had seen little or nothing of the world. Passing a number of years in Edinburgh, while finishing her education, under the roof of her brother, an actor of some celebrity, she had seen society under every form and phase; had mixed with the polished, the

gay, the depraved; with men of letters, with men of the world. Her mind, too, was stored with literature. She had read, without let or hindrance, every book that came in her way, good, bad, and indifferent; she had flirted with every man who had crossed her path; and ended, so far as her story concerned me, in eloping with Mr Brodie, my quondam drawing master. And this was Mrs Brodie, the chosen friend and companion of Cecile Raye, who, a short year before, had vowed to consecrate herself to the service of God! Oh frail humanity! oh treacherous heart!

Our lessons soon became a mere form, and the hour was generally spent in listening to Mrs Brodie either singing or talking; then another hour perhaps in reading together a French novel, or some book which I would not have ventured to introduce at home; and if occasionally conscience would sting while I was enjoying this forbidden fruit, the soothing answer was ready then, just as it was in Eden thousands of years ago, "Ye shall not surely die; but ye shall be as gods, *knowing* good and evil."

And so the time went on. Every minute I could with decency spare from home, was spent with Mrs Brodie. We read together, sang together, painted together, and, as the fine spring weather came in, walked together. I was happy, or at least fancied I was. Home duties, my gentle sisters, were almost spurned. They had nothing

in common with me—with my fine mind and powerful imagination. I had at last found a congenial soul, and was therefore warranted in casting overboard home affections, home duties, home ties!

By degrees Mrs Brodie became my *confidante*, and drew from me, almost unwillingly, a confession of my love for Frank, and the sacrifice I had made of it on Aggie's account. Unwillingly, I say, for this love, this sacrifice, I had always looked upon as things most sacred, and had not ventured to confide them even to my mother. Mortified and miserable enough I was at my weakness in confessing this secret, but my misery and mortification were increased tenfold at the manner in which she received it.

"Quite a bit of romance, I declare, Cecile! But after all, it was just calves' love. I don't suppose you cared very much about him, or you would not have given him up so lightly."

"Mrs Brodie!" I was almost choking with indignation.

"Yes, yes, I know; you *fancied* you loved him. Girls' first loves are generally fancies. But you will love again, and then you will know something of what love is."

"I shall never love again; I have made a vow."

"Made a vow! Oh, I declare!" and Mrs Brodie laughed outright. "You should have been a nun."

"Yes I should, I suppose, if I had not been a

Protestant. But I don't think that immuring one's-self within cloister walls can make one a whit better than others. Indeed, I am inclined to think, on the contrary, that in such a narrow sphere, the influence of one wicked man or woman would necessarily be more powerful and more dangerous than that of twenty in the world without."

"O dear me! what a long lecture! But as for me, I never thought anything about it, save that such a life would not suit me at all." And then she commenced humming in a low voice,

> "I won't be a nun, I won't be a nun,
> I'm too fond of pleasure,
> And I cannot be a nun."

"I don't think you are very fond of pleasure," I said, answering the words of the song.

"Don't you? Ah, that's because you don't know me."

"Oh, but I've known you for more than six months now, and you've never been anything but a sober, staid, stay-at-home matron."

"I'm obliged for the certificate; perhaps it has suited my purpose," and a strange light gleamed in the yellow eye.

"Purpose! what purpose?"

"O never mind! I fear I'm cattish this morning, and wish to— Let me change the subject. Would you mind taking a bet that, before another six months, you will be over head and ears in love with some one else?"

"Mrs Brodie, I don't understand you this morning. I think I shall go home."

"Oh, are you angry? I cannot allow that; we must be friends. It is a lovely morning; come, we shall have a walk. Perhaps we will understand each other then. There, I don't think you've seen that yet," and she tossed over a new number of the "Wandering Jew," which was then coming out. "I won't be five minutes."

I sat down again, subduing my indignation, and was soon engrossed in the story. The bait took: this was just one of the last books I would have ventured to introduce at home.

Soon she returned, and we set out. We had not decided where we should go, and meanwhile we walked slowly down one of the most fashionable streets in the town. As we approached the Reading-room, round the entrance to which a group of fashionable young men were lounging, Mrs Brodie said, "Oh, Cecile, look, there is the handsomest man in Dunearn!"

Without thinking, I looked up, and met a pair of fine blue eyes fixed on me—blue eyes, I could see, even in that moment of confusion—belonging to a fine tall man with a very handsome face and singularly aristocratic bearing. I also saw, what astonished me, that Mrs Brodie and he mutually recognised each other by bowing as they passed.

As soon as we were out of hearing, I said, "Oh, Mrs Brodie, you should not have asked me to look

up just at that moment; you must have seen they were looking at us."

"Well, and what did that signify? You have surely lived long enough in the world to be able to be looked at. Really, much as I love you, I am almost inclined to be angry to think that a gentleman cannot cast his eyes in your direction without you reddening all over like a poppy. Rest assured, Cecile, that though blushing may by some be thought interesting, it is reckoned by all well-bred people excessively *mauvais ton.*

"Well, perhaps; but I can't help it, and I've no ambition to have a face of brass."

"Cecile, you are quite in a temper; but I suppose friends as well as lovers must have their quarrels, *mais n' importe.* Don't you think Captain Moreton a handsome man?"

"Very; but how do you happen to know him?"

"Oh, we are old friends; I knew him in Edinburgh some years ago, and, strange to say, we have renewed our acquaintance: the other day he came in quest of Mr Brodie to get him to execute a bust of his mother in marble, and once or twice he has come since to make the necessary arrangements."

"Has Mr Brodie undertaken it, then?"

"He has."

"Is the lady to sit for her bust?"

"Oh dear no; Lady Belraven died many years ago, when her only son was but a child; but Cap-

tain Moreton has left with Mr Brodie a miniature and a statuette in Parian of his mother (exquisite things both). You would like to see them. If you can come to-morrow, I will take you to the studio to see them. Mr Brodie will be at work there between twelve and two. Do you think that time will suit you?"

"Oh yes, I shall be very happy. You know how much I like pretty things."

"Pretty is rather too tame a word, Cecile."

"Well, perhaps I shall give my verdict when I see them."

"You little doubter! you are not amiable this morning."

"Am I not? Well, then, I shall be amiable to-morrow between the hours of twelve and two."

"Most desirable, I assure you," and Mrs Brodie smiled one of her peculiar smiles.

Much of Mrs Brodie's power over me lay in those strange smiles, and in those wondrous gleams of light which glittered in the yellow eyes. What did they mean? I was always trying to interpret them, to understand *her;* but in vain. To me she was a riddle, a mystery. The Egyptian sphinx herself could scarce have created more mysterious wonder in my breast than did Mrs Brodie! And yet I fancied I loved her. Loved her! yes, with a love akin to that which the simple bird has for the syren snake, or the poor little mouse for the fascinating cat! "*Perfect love,*" we are told, "*casteth*

out fear," and the nearer human love approaches the divine, the more will this untroubled calm, this holy peace, be felt.

After a long and beautiful walk by the banks of the river, unvaried, however, by a single incident, we turned our faces homeward, and parted—till to-morrow.

CHAPTER XVI.

Mr Brodie's Studio.

SUNSHINY, bright, and bracing, came the morrow; a fine spring morning, with a clear blue sky, flaked with soft fleecy clouds, and birds warbling and singing as they busied themselves with their little nests. Indeed, I had been wakened by these very birds, and all the morning my ear had seemed filled with a dreamy echo of their warblings. From the moment I rose till the instant I set out to keep my appointment, I was wonderfully, singularly happy. I possessed one of those nervous temperaments over which the most trifling atmospheric causes produce most subtle effects. A change of wind would make me shiver, a cloud would make me sad. But on this morning, this sunny April morning, photographed for ever on my memory, all was sunshine without and within. I dressed, with perhaps a little more care than usual, in a simple

dress of pale lavender de-laine, fitting close to the throat; put on my new spring bonnet, a white dunstable, trimmed with white sarcenet ribbon, and finished inside by a pretty border of tulle and pink rose-buds; flung an Indian scarf round my shoulders, and set out.

The chimes were sounding twelve as I ascended the few steps leading to Mrs Brodie's. She opened the door herself, and smiling, said, "Punctual to a minute."

"Yes; and you too are ready?"

"For a wonder; you know that punctuality is not one of my cardinal virtues."

"It is one of mine; I don't believe anything can be well done without it."

"Well, you are a wonderful little personage; if you live to be old, you'll be nothing but crotchets; let me see, only eighteen, and you make vows and place punctuality in your creed! But won't you come in?"

"No, it's no use if, as I suppose, you are quite ready."

"Just as you please; we will go now." And drawing her gloves from her pocket she commenced putting them on. After she had done so, she examined me with a somewhat critical eye, and then she said, "Cecile, do you know, you are looking very well this morning; perhaps it's that love of a bonnet, but I assure you I never saw you looking better."

"I am glad you think so; I'm sometimes such an ugly thing."

"Oh, what nonsense! You don't always look so well, I admit, but a girl with your head and classical features can never be plain, far less ugly. It is I, your dearest friend, who belong to the genus ugly. Come now, confess, did'nt you think me hideous when you saw me first?"

I hesitated, and then began to stammer out, "No, no, not hideous. I did'nt think you pretty, I confess—but—but I have often thought you beautiful since."

Mrs Brodie waited, with lips apart and eyes fixed on mine, till I had finished, then a sudden glow of emotion reddened her sallow cheek, darkened her yellow eye, parted her coral lips, shewed her pearly teeth, and in a tone of triumph she exclaimed, "Thank you, Cecile, that is the only beauty I prize,—the beauty, the power of expression, which in an instant, like a glow of sunset, can brighten, can glorify, the dingiest skin, the plainest features. Thank you, Cecile!"

We had now reached the building which contained Mr Brodie's school-room and studio, and without any ceremony entered at once.

The artist had commenced his labours, but very good naturedly laid down his chisel and welcomed me kindly. He was a generous warm hearted man, Mr Brodie, and I liked to feel the cordial grasp of his hand; I liked also to feel afresh the

old influence which this spot, this studio, formerly exercised on my mind. Pleasant old associations rose fresh and vigorous with every instant. And yet it was not much of a place. A square room, middle sized, with one window so constructed that the light could be admitted or excluded at the artist's will; a room not particularly clean, for Mr Brodie had too many valuables about to care for the dust being frequently disturbed; a room, however, notwithstanding all its litter and lumber, its marble chippings, its smeared palettes, and scores of dirty brushes (all sacred things to me), which in rough outline and finished painting was full of the breathings of genius. As I lingered, with a pleasure impossible to describe, and my soul touched, so to speak, with a coal from the altar of genius, before some of his grander productions, Mrs Brodie and her husband enjoyed a *tête à tête* of which I was wholly ignorant, till my attention was suddenly arrested by Mrs Brodie saying,

"Come here, Cecile, you seem to have forgotten the object of our visit. And holding up the miniature, she added, "Is it not beautiful?" Then pointing to the statuette, which stood on a bracket near Mr Brodie, and from which he was copying, she continued, "And that, what do you think of *that?*"

I was about to answer, when Mr Brodie said, "Pray withhold your verdict, Miss Raye, till I tell

you that there is a question in dispute between Mrs Brodie and me at the present moment. I have just discovered a remarkable likeness to you in this statuette. My wife is blind, or pretends she cannot see it. Will you oblige me by laying aside your bonnet, and arranging your hair in the same style, that I may be able to judge better whether this likeness is real, as I think, or imaginary."

Mr Brodie's request had to me the air of command. He had been my teacher for years, and without the slightest hesitation, I immediately did what he told me; took my pretty new bonnet carefully off, swept my hair from my face, and fastened the wayward curls in a loose knot behind.

Mr Brodie watched these little operations with a look of pleasure. When I had finished, his eye kindled, a look of rapture lit up his face, and he exclaimed, "I knew it, I knew it! I could not have been mistaken; my eye never deceives me! Really, Miss Raye, you must favour me with one or two sittings. I would rather model from flesh and blood, than from all the copies in the world!"

I coloured with pleasure. I will not deny that I was pleased, nay, proud, to be thought like the beautiful statuette; and I was just on the point of saying, "How very happy I would be to give a few sittings," when Mrs Brodie, her face all a-glow with the tempest within, broke forth indignantly, "I really can't understand you at all, Mr Brodie; even supposing there exists a likeness in your

brain between that beautiful statuette and my pretty Cecile, which, with all my affection for her, I cannot perceive, do you think yourself warranted in substituting a living ideal for the authorised copies which Captain Moreton has given you of his mother?"

Just as she finished speaking, some one entered the studio. We turned towards the door, and behold, Captain Moreton!

I coloured, caught my bonnet, and was about to put it hastily on, when Mr Brodie laid his hand upon my arm, "One moment, Miss Raye, I beg—I entreat;" he spoke in a low, somewhat anxious tone of voice; then addressing the new-comer, "You are welcome, most welcome, Captain Moreton. You must be umpire."

"Umpire! Not between rival goddesses, I hope," and he bowed to us ladies.

"Oh no," said Mr Brodie, smiling, "nothing so Olympian as that. You are only to be umpire between husband and wife."

"Worse and worse!" and Captain Moreton shrugged his shoulders, and glanced to Mrs Brodie; "I must positively decline."

"Not till you know the subject of dispute," and then Mr Brodie briefly explained; while I, placed in this somewhat awkward situation, still stood in the position in which I had been placed, with my eyes fixed on the ground, and the colour coming and going on my cheeks.

But Captain Moreton was a man of the world, not an artist, and therefore not prepared, whatever private opinion he held, to pronounce it at the risk of offending a lady. So he simply said, "I have the utmost confidence, Mr Brodie, in your judgment. Use every means and appliance within your reach to make your work worthy of you—worthy of her whom it is intended to represent. She was the dearest and the best of mothers, as well as the most beautiful of women. Would to God she had lived, to be my guide and counsellor in manhood, as she watched over me in childhood, then, then, perhaps, I might have been—" he stopped abruptly, his voice seemed choked with emotion. I ventured to look towards him; our eyes met. Suddenly he exclaimed, "Is it possible you resemble my mother?" Then recollecting himself, he said, "But I beg pardon, Miss Raye; I have not yet had the pleasure of being introduced to you. Mrs Brodie, will you do me that kindness?"

"With the greatest pleasure, Captain Moreton," and then a formal introduction followed.

"I must warn you, however, Captain Moreton," Mrs Brodie continued, "that my dear friend, Miss Raye, with her many amiabilities, has a few peculiarities; and, unlike most young ladies, she dreads the sight of a red coat as much as that of a mad dog."

"Oh, dreadful! Is this true, Miss Raye? Or

must I impeach the rival goddess (bowing, as he spoke, to Mrs Brodie) with a libel?"

I was silent for an instant, but silence would not do; Mrs Brodie's yellow eyes, full of a world of mischief, were fixed upon me; Captain Moreton looked as if his life hung upon my answer. "The statement," I said, "is somewhat exaggerated, but it is no libel."

"You have the merit of being candid, at any rate, if not complimentary, Miss Raye." Then seeing I looked distressed, for my tell-tale features were as usual at work, he continued: "Perhaps, after all, you are not far wrong; for my own part, I do wonder sometimes what young ladies find in us "red coats"—a set of knaves, or, at best, coxcombs and fools."

"Too severe, by half, I protest," said Mrs Brodie; "for my own part, I've always been a worshipper of Mars."

"And yet you ran away with a great round-shouldered clod-hopper of an artist," said her husband smiling; "Alas, for the inconsistency of women!"

"She placed her hand playfully upon his mouth, "Hush, *caro mio*, you know it was the soul within that fascinated me."

Meanwhile, I was rapidly putting forward my curls, and preparing to put on my bonnet, painfully conscious all the while that Captain Moreton was watching my movements; as I tied the string of my bonnet, he said,

"Miss Raye, this is truly an unexpected pleasure; I have wished now for many weeks to have the pleasure of your acquaintance. May I venture to hope that we shall be able to overcome your antipathy to "red coats;" or, at all events, that you will make an exception in my favour." He spoke in a low and earnest tone.

I smiled and blushed, but said nothing. Captain Moreton continued, "There is to be a review—quite a field-day—next week; to those who love military spectacles it will be a treat; and those who *hate* soldiers might perhaps learn to think a little better of them when they see them surrounded with something of the pomp and circumstance of glorious war."

"Is there anything *glorious* in war?" I asked.

"There! I told you," said Mrs Brodie, smiling, "another of my little friend's amiable peculiarities."

"May I answer your question by putting another, Miss Raye?" asked Captain Moreton.

"Certainly."

"Are you a quakeress?"

"*Point de tout,*" I could scarcely help laughing; "May I ask what makes you think so?"

"Why, they are the only people in the world I know, who make a principle of holding similar views."

"But there is no principle in my case," I replied; "I only *feel* that there is something fearful in thousands of human beings being trained to

murder, to butcher other thousands of human beings."

Captain Moreton reddened perceptibly. "You express yourself strongly, Miss Raye."

"*I told you,*" said Mrs Brodie.

It was now my turn to feel vexed. To give annoyance in any shape or form always gave me pain; and in my anxiety to please I was often tempted to sacrifice even my ideas of right. Besides, what was I, a mere child in worldly experience, that I had on the impulse of the moment expressed my feelings on a question I had never seriously studied. I therefore made the *amende honorable* as quickly as possible, and said,

"Will you pardon my somewhat impulsive statement, Captain Moreton? I should not have spoken so hastily?"

"Pardon you! who could refuse anything to those pleading eyes?" he replied, with an air of gallantry which seemed natural to him; "I only wish, Miss Raye, it were in your power to offend me twenty times a day."

A smile and a blush were my only answers to this complimentary speech.

Meanwhile, Mr Brodie was giving unmistakeable signs that it was time for us to leave; he was rapidly gathering up and putting aside his materials, and was just in the act of drawing out his watch, when Captain Moreton said, "I fear I must apologise for encroaching on your valuable

time. Will you permit me to express the pleasure, the happiness, I have enjoyed during my short visit here. Good morning, ladies; good morning, Mr Brodie;" and with this somewhat inflated speech, the dashing Captain was gone.

"Now ladies," said Mr Brodie, "I have no hesitation in saying, 'Clear out;' I am five minutes too late already."

"What! without one word of congratulation to Cecile here?" said his wife; "I declare I never saw such a sudden conquest in my life. She's only got to play her cards well, and she will not fail to become Lady Belraven!"

"Nonsense!" I exclaimed, somewhat impetuously; "a person with half an eye would see you were jumping at a hasty conclusion: Captain Moreton evidently makes it his business to pay compliments; and after all, what are they worth?"

"We shall see," said Mrs Brodie; "the most important events of life often hang upon a trifle; and though I am not, like you, a devout believer in providence, I am in fate. Of all chances in the world, what brought Captain Moreton here to-day?"

"I really don't know; and if truth must be told, *ma plus chère amie*, I really don't care."

"Well, good bye, you incorrigible girl; but remember it's nothing less than Lady Belraven, a high stake. Heigho! I wish I were single!"

I shook my head, and we parted.

CHAPTER XVII.

At the Review.

NEXT evening Mrs Brodie dropped in somewhat unexpectedly. I had seen her in the morning, and she had not even hinted at the possibility of doing so. There was, however, nothing remarkable in this; she was in the habit of visiting us at all times and hours of the day; and at all times was a welcome visitor. With my father she was a great favourite; my mother loved her, and often wondered how such a woman could have committed such a wrong; the children adored her; Aggie alone, who seemed fascinated at first, was now timid and shy in her presence. Wherein lay this chameleon-hued woman's wondrous power? She played and sung by the hour to my father; she sat at my mother's feet on a low stool, and listened and talked to her enthusiastically concerning the sermons of our revered pastor; she caressed the

children, and gave them pretty bon-bons. And this was all. Anybody almost could have done this; ah, but there are so many ways of doing the same thing! and Mrs Brodie's way was like her singing, peculiarly her own. Nor were her pleasing powers allowed to go unrewarded. Many delicacies from foreign countries, plentiful in a rich ship-owner's house, but which a poor artist's means could never reach, found their way to that artist's table, and perhaps these little gifts, valueless to us, but invaluable to them, had no small share in strengthening and increasing the friendship between the two families.

On this evening Mrs Brodie played and sang as usual; my mother sat with her knitting, Aggie with her embroidery; Susie's fair round face was bent over the first number of one of these magazines, which now, in every form and variety, almost deluge our homes, and wore while, knitting needles in fingers, she tried to make out a new pattern, a look of puzzled perplexity which was highly amusing; my father lay back in his easy chair, his slippered feet raised high against the sides of the burnished brass grate, where in a thousand scintillations the living flame was reflected as it danced and leapt o'er the glowing embers. I hung over the piano, turning the leaves, taking part in a duet, or chiming in when I could venture to do so without spoiling the effect. Some scenes in life, often from unknown causes,

are for ever photographed on memory, and this was one of them. Often since that time has the remembrance of that large dining room, with its curtained windows, its look of cosy comfort, while the keen spring winds blew without, and its group of happy faces, come back fresh, very fresh, to my memory. Ah, dear old home! mine no longer. Where is now that group of happy faces—scattered? —dead?

By and bye Mr Brodie was announced. He had come, as they say in some parts of the United Kingdom, to "fetch" his wife home; but first they must have supper; and with supper conversation became general, and, accidentally or otherwise, it turned on the review, which, Mr Brodie said, "was to be a very fine affair."

"How is it to be very fine?" asked Susie.

"Why, the Commander-in-chief of the forces in Scotland is to inspect the troops, he will be accompanied by a brilliant staff, and many of the aristocracy are expected to be on the ground; I should decidedly say, it will be a very fine sight."

"How I should like to go," cried little Susie, her face glowing with excitement.

"But how could ye go, ye foolish bairn?" asked my father; "ye would be crushed to pieces in the crowd, or run over by the horses."

"Oh, no, no! if that's all, I could take care of myself; could *we* not, Cecile?"

I understood the appeal; Susie wished me to

be, as I often was on such occasions, special pleader. But I was silent; the thought of Captain Moreton flashed across my mind, what would he think if he saw me there? Speedily, however, I re-assured myself. Nothing was more unlikely than that he should either see or notice me; his duties would command his attention, and even if they did not, many friends of his own would in all likelihood be there. Was not he an aristocrat? Our paths in life must ever lie widely apart. Then the colour mounted to my cheeks when I thought that he should ever have occurred to my mind at all.

Meanwhile, Aggie had asked quietly, "Is it wrong, mama, to go to a review?"

"I have not considered the question, Aggie; but I should say, looking at it in the abstract, that there is nothing wrong in it. Many scenes and many amusements, simple and harmless enough in themselves, become wrong from the *motives* which induce people to attend them; indeed, in this respect, there is little, very little, right in this world."

"If your mamma approves," said Mrs Brodie, who now spoke on the subject for the first time, "I could propose a plan by which we might all go —by all I mean the three girls and myself, for I'm a very child so far as sight seeing is concerned; and that is, if you, Mr Raye, would drive us in your nice little phaeton. I'm sure you would

enjoy the sight yourself; at all events, you would enjoy seeing us four *children* happy."

My father smiled; "You are a grand schemer, Mrs Brodie; but what if my sensible sedate mare would not approve your scheme? 'Am no thinkin' she would care much for your drums, and fifes, and soldiers!"

"Oh, if you promise to take us, we'll risk the mare. Won't we, Cecile? won't we, Susie?"

"Yes, yes!" cried Susie. "There's a dear good papa!"

"Ou ay, it's aye good dear papa when there's begging going. You think to come owre me wi' yer wheedling; but I ken better." This speech might have proved something disheartening, had it not been for the very genial smile which accompanied it, and which was only provocative of another attack; for Mrs Brodie and Susie returned to the charge, and did not give in till my father said, "Weel, weel, if it's a bonnie day, an' I'm no busy, we'll see."

And with this assurance they were well content; for my father always strained a point to fulfil anything he had said approaching to a promise.

The review was appointed to take place on Tuesday, and on Monday Mrs Brodie, Aggie, and myself, in anticipation of it, went to a fashionable milliner's establishment to make some purchases. They were by no means great—a new border and ties for Mrs Brodie's bonnet, and gloves for us

three girls. We were some time in selecting these, trifles though they were, and while doing so naturally allowed our eyes to range round the very beautiful articles displayed in the show-room. A dress of rich violet silk attracted my attention, and I expressed my admiration of it.

"Yes, it is very beautiful," said the saleswoman; "it has been ordered for the review to-morrow. This bonnet also," pointing, as she spoke, to a fine white chip, trimmed simply with an ostrich feather. "They are for Lady Blanche Drummond, a very pretty creature of eighteen. She is the daughter, you know, of the Earl of Kinkeld; and they say, young as she is, that she is engaged to the honourable Captain Moreton, only son of Lord Belraven."

I started, but I kept my eyes fixed on the gloves, and, to hide my confusion, said, "I think I shall have this primrose pair. Don't you think, Mrs Brodie, we should all have the same colour?"

But Mrs Brodie was engrossed, and did not answer. The gossip we had been hearing was of the kind that particularly interested her, and she said, "I think you must be mistaken, Miss Lee. I have the honour of knowing Captain Moreton well, and I think, if he were engaged, I could not fail to know of it."

"Well, perhaps, ma'am," replied the saleswoman, with a very perceptible addition of respect in her manner. "I had my information from very

good authority; from no less a person than from Dowager Lady ——"

"I shall take this pair," I said, for I felt somewhat strangely in haste to be gone. "Mrs Brodie, allow me to make you a present of these; I think they are your size. Now, Aggie, we must find a pair for you and Susie. I should like them all of the same shade, Miss Lee, please."

This effectually occupied the saleswoman's attention, as two or three boxes had to be turned over ere the exact shade and sizes were procured. At last we succeeded; the parcel was made up, the money paid, and we left the warehouse.

The threshold, however, was scarcely crossed, when Mrs Brodie broke out, "I don't believe a word of that nonsense, Cecile; do you?"

"What nonsense, Mrs Brodie?"

"That nonsense about Captain Moreton's engagement, to be sure! Some gossip of some old toothless dowager."

"Well, if she never says anything worse, she won't do much harm," I replied, smiling. "Nothing, in my opinion, seems more natural. The only son of a wealthy peer, and the penniless daughter of an Earl; the one handsome, *distingué*, eight-and-twenty; the other fair, pretty, sweet, and eighteen!"

"You seem to take it coolly, Cecile," she said, with an undisguised air of bitterness in her voice.

"Why not? I cannot see how such an engagement can concern either you or me."

"Then you are as blind as the three blind mice in the 'Nursery Rhymes.' Positively, Cecile, I've no patience with you."

I shrugged my shoulders, looked in her face, and smiled. She returned my smile. It was only great friends who could venture to talk to each other as we did.

I must have been more excited about the review than I imagined, for my dreams that night were filled with it. Strains of martial music filled my ears; soldiers passed and re-passed before me; but, in the midst of all, I was constantly engaged in watching an aristocratic-looking blonde, robed in a rich violet silk dress. 'Twere vain to tell all the situations, possible and impossible, in which, through the absurd inconsistency of dreams, this violet-robed creature was found. Now, mounted on a magnificent war steed, she was flying across the plain; and anon, pale and bleeding, I was dragging her from under the wheels of her chariot, while Captain Moreton looked idly on!

Several times I awoke, and, wroth and indignant at my folly, as I called it, gave myself a severe lecture on the absurdity of dreaming such dreams; but it was no use, for as soon as my eyes closed, the same scenes were enacted and re-enacted before my bewildered brain.

The morning rose gray and cloudy, but long

before the hour appointed the sun shone out bright and "bonnie," and gave promise of a lovely day. My father, even if he had wished to draw out of his promise, could have found no excuse in the weather; but he evidently did not wish, for soon our well-appointed though somewhat old-fashioned phaeton, with its well-groomed chesnut mare and silver-mounted harness, bright as hands could make it, was brought to the door. A few minutes afterwards Mrs Brodie made her appearance, but we had still to wait, impatiently enough, for my father, who, the groom said, "could not leave the counting-house till eleven." This was somewhat trying, especially as we could see the park from our windows rapidly filling with carriages, vehicles, and pedestrians of all descriptions.

At last Susie, who had been stretching out her neck for some time in the direction of the town, shouted, "Hurrah! here comes papa; now, girls, get in and lose no time, I'm sure we've lost plenty already."

"Perhaps it will be as well," I said; "I see papa is hurrying; will you please to go in Mrs Brodie?"

"Yes, do; there's a good creature," cried Susie, who was brimful of excitement, "Aggie and Cecile will get in beside you, and I, oh, how jolly! shall go up beside papa; who knows, perhaps he'll let me drive."

"I'm sure he'll do nothing of the kind, you little mad-cap, you'd break all our necks, Susie," I said."

"You'll see, Miss Cecile," she replied, with a saucy toss of her head, and then taking the reins, she seized the whip and commenced brandishing it in a somewhat threatening way.

"Tak care, Miss Susan, tak care, ye'll frichten the meare, she's gae skittish. Oh! thank gudeness, here's the master himsel'. Noo, my young leddy, noo; gie the reins to your papa," and then, as my father took his seat, he added, "Ye'll keep a steady han', sir; she's a bit frisky the day."

My father gave him a reassuring nod, and turning round said, "I hope ye're a' pretty comfortable there." And then, without waiting our answer, shook the reins, and sober "Bess" set off at a spanking trot.

The ground was soon reached, and a very beautiful and brilliant scene presented itself to our eyes. The park, or rather plain, chosen for the review, was a kind of vast amphitheatre surrounded on all sides by hills gradually rising till they were lost in the range of the grand old Grampians, on the towering summits of which the winter snows still reposed, and shone white and glistering under the rays of an April sun. On one side of the plain, separating it from the mountains, flowed the river, so quietly, so imperceptibly, that it resembled rather a large sleeping lake, on whose placid

bosom mansions, villas, trees (still leafless), hills, mountains, and the sky, were all most faithfully and even flatteringly mirrored; while the plain, the great foreground of the landscape, was enlivened and warmed by masses of troops, whose animated movements, bright uniforms, and glittering bayonets, gave life, colour, and brilliancy to the whole.

The work of the day had begun in earnest before we reached the spot; and it was with some difficulty that we found a position in the line of carriages where we could obtain a good view of the operations of the troops. This done, I commenced with considerable interest to watch their movements; and, most naturally I believe, to run my eye along the continually changing lines in search of Captain Moreton, as being the only individual in the hundreds before me of whom I had the slightest personal acquaintance. At a distance, and among the many well-mounted and handsome men, such a discovery was somewhat difficult; but at last I selected one whom I thought to be him, and was quickly confirmed in my opinion by Mrs Brodie, who had evidently been engaged in the same manner, whispering in my ear, "There he is, look! don't you see him?"

"Yes, yes! but see, who comes here?" pointing as I spoke to an aristocratic chariot drawn by two prancing greys, which almost rubbed wheels with our humble phaeton as the fat, imperious coach-

man drove into a narrow space right a-head of us. "It must be the Lady Blanche," I continued. "Did you notice the violet silk, how rich and lovely it looked? and her sweet, pretty, fair face, tinted with the reflection of the dainty pink parasol? and the little hand with its pale, exquisitely-fitting, green glove? Oh dear, how very lovely she is! I declare I have taken quite a fancy to her! Do you know," I added in a somewhat lower voice, "I was dreaming about her last night."

"Cecile, you are a little goose!" was the complimentary retort.

"Well, do you know," I replied quite seriously, "I often think so."

"You may at least lay claim to the grace of humility, my good Cecile; for myself, I'm never troubled with such humbling views of my own imperfections."

"I don't envy you such experience at all, Mrs Brodie," said Aggie, in a quiet, sad, almost reproving tone of voice; "I think that unless we feel our constant weakness, wickedness, and folly, we cannot sufficiently magnify the merits of our great Redeemer."

Mrs Brodie looked astounded; and I, bending forward quietly and kissing Aggie's pale cheek, whispered, "This is not quite a place, Aggie dear, to speak of those things. Are you not enjoying this beautiful scene?"

"Yes, sister mine," said Aggie; "but somehow

or other it is always in the midst of scenes of gaiety and beauty like this that I think most of solemn things—of death and eternity."

"Hush, Aggie dear; it is strange that such thoughts should come in your head just now; do try and think of something else, of—of—" and I whispered a name which brought the blood coursing over her pale cheek; and then, fearing to draw down Mrs Brodie's raillery on too sensitive Aggie, I exclaimed, "If you get up now you will see Lady Blanche Drummond; she is standing up surveying the field with her opera glass."

Aggie obeyed my request, and after looking at her for a minute, said, "She's very pretty," and sat quietly down again.

I, however, continued watching the fair creature in whom my interest had been so unaccountably raised. She still stood, heedless of the restlessness of the horses, watching through her glass every change and movement of the troops, which she evidently well understood, and bending down occasionally to communicate her discoveries to an aged lady who was her sole companion. Suddenly the soldiers fired their first volley; the grey steeds of her carriage commenced to plunge and rear; and in an instant the Lady Blanche, losing her balance, fell right among the feet of the excited horses!

Perhaps I was the only one who saw the accident; be that as it may, I held my breath, clasped my hands, sprang over the side of the phaeton, and,

almost before I knew what I did, was dragging the lifeless violet-robed figure from under the hoofs of the horses. Excitement and confusion were now reigning around me. Other horses were taking fright, but I heeded them not, heeded nothing till I had dragged Lady Blanche to a place of comparative safety; till I had dashed from a bottle, which fortunately happened to be in my pocket, a quantity of Eau-de-Cologne on the pale face; till I had staunched a wound on the temple with my handkerchief, from which the crimson blood was trickling over the fair forehead; and till with a long sigh she had opened her large blue eyes and fixed them with a bewildered look in my face. Then I ventured to think what was to be done next, and looking around I was surprised to find that I was surrounded by quite a group of gentlemen. Captain Moreton was at my side,

"You're a good brave girl, Miss Raye," he said; "how can we ever repay you? You have saved my cousin's life!"

"Thank God!" I exclaimed, "you are here; and she is safe!" As I spoke, a sudden faintness seized me; the arm which was still supporting Lady Blanche's head fell powerless at my side; I felt a powerful grasp thrown round me; and heard a familiar voice say, "My brave bit lassie; this has been owre mickle for her. We maun get her hame to her mither as fast's we can."

And my father was as good as his word.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Earl's Visit.

ANY thoughtful person taking a quiet retrospect of his life, will find a period when events seem to have thickened, crowded, hurried around him; and when, like a rudderless vessel on life's stormy ocean, he was driven to and fro by the force of circumstances, the plaything, apparently, of a blind destiny or a wayward chance. I come now to such a period in mine.

Weary and listless from the effects of the previous day's excitement, I was reclining, in a half-dreaming, half-dozing state, on the parlour sofa, when I was startled by a loud peal at the door bell. I sprung up, looked at my watch, found it was not near the postman's time, and waited somewhat impatiently to learn the cause. In a few minutes our neat little housemaid entered, carrying a tray on which were placed a magnificent

bouquet of greenhouse flowers, and a large basket of hothouse fruits. A note lay on the tray, and while I was silent from admiration and wonder, Jenny said, "If you please, Miss Cecile, these are for you, with the Earl of Kinkeld's compliments; and the man is waiting an answer to that note. And oh, Miss Cecile," the girl continued, forgetting her English in her excitement, "ye never saw sic a man, a big strappin' fellow; six feet, if he's an inch; an' a powdered head, an' a red coat, an' knee breeches! Oh, Miss Cecile!"

"Hush, Jenny," I said, "you may go now; in five minutes you may return for my answer," and the girl departed, well-pleased, to take, I doubt not, a few more admiring glances at "the man in the red coat."

Left alone, I tore open, with somewhat of a throbbing heart, the coroneted crested note, and read,

"*The Earl of Kinkeld presents compliments to Miss Raye, and begs to ask if he may take the liberty of waiting upon her in person to-morrow, to tender his thanks for the very great service rendered to his daughter yesterday.*

"*Kinkeld House,*

"*Wednesday morning.*"

Nothing would be easier than to answer that note, I thought; so, to lose no time, I determined to write the answer, and then shew both at the same time to mamma. I pulled my desk toward

me, selected a sheet of extra glazed and finely tinted note paper, and began,

"*Miss Raye presents com*—" then a vague remembrance flashed across my mind that I had either read or heard that it was not *the thing* to present compliments to a superior, and I tossed aside the sheet. Selecting another, I placed it before me, and, with a slight feeling of embarrassment, hesitated, wondering how I should couch my simple answer. It was such a thing for me to be writing to an Earl! The difficulty grew upon me; I commenced pushing back my hair, playing with my pen. Immediately Jenny entered, "Is the note ready, Miss Cecile?"

"Oh, botheration! no, Jenny; just stand at the window there, and I'll write it in a minute;" and saying to myself, Right or wrong, here goes, I dashed off—

"*It will afford Miss Raye the greatest pleasure to see the Earl of Kinkeld to-morrow.*

"*Waterloo Terrace,*

"*Wednesday.*"

Then I passed through the open door into the hall, to go in search of my mother, catching a glimpse, as I did so, of the Earl's magnificent-looking servant, who certainly had considerable claims to Jenny's admiration.

Finding my mother, I placed the Earl's note in her hand. She started when she saw it, and the

slightest tinge of colour shewed itself in her hueless face. "*I* suppose you must answer this, Cecile?" she said, half inquiringly.

"Yes, mamma, I have done so," and I placed my answer in her hand.

She glanced over it, but did not appear satisfied. "Could you not have written something better than this? it seems so short and stiff."

"I daresay I could have written something else," I replied, smiling, "but I'm afraid it must do; the servant is waiting my answer; and oh, mamma, I've forgotten, the Earl has sent me an exquisite present of fruit and flowers."

"Of fruit and flowers! Then you have not thanked him for them, Cecile; I think you may at least do that," and my mother's face brightened at finding fresh matter for my laconic note.

"I suppose I ought," I said, and I retired to add the following P.S. to my answer:

"*Miss Raye begs to tender her most sincere thanks to the Earl of Kinkeld for his very lovely present of fruit and flowers.*"

Then I hastily sealed my note, and gave it to Jenny, with a very decided feeling of dissatisfaction at the whole affair, and a very decided wish that the Earl had kept his civility to himself.

But my dissatisfaction evaporated under the influence of the flowery gift, and the sweet perfumes it was exhaling. Since ever I remembered,

the love of flowers had been with me a passion, and as I bent now over flowers which rarely came in my way—the waxy camelia, the rich geranium, the incense-breathing heliotrope, and others of the same class—I felt as if transported to another world.

After hanging over them for some time in a species of ecstatic delight, I carried first the flowers, and then the fruit, into the drawing-room, arranged them in the best light, and exhibited them by turns to the several members of the family with a considerable amount of admiration and pride.

This gift of the Earl's, and his anticipated visit, were great events in our family, and constituted the chief topic of conversation during the subsequent part of the day.

"An' so, Cissy," said my father, on being informed of what had taken place in his absence, "this affair is going to be quite a feather in your cap. Wha wad think o' an Earl payin' a visit to a dochter o' mine. Ye maunna be owre prood aboot it, mind."

"Oh no, papa, I'm not a bit proud about it; what is there to be proud at? I suppose an Earl's just a man!"

"Ou ay, it's not that I mean; but I do think there's something to be proud of in savin' a fellow creature's life, be she gentle or semple."

"Do you really think I saved her life, papa? Captain Moreton said that too; but I don't think there was so much danger."

But my father had caught at my words. "Captain wha, did ye say? what d'ye ken aboot captains?"

Suddenly I remembered my father's prejudice at officers, and felt myself in a dilemma; my mother's eye, too, was fixed upon me. Naturally candid and honest though I was, I hesitated. Would I tell the whole of the simple story of my acquaintance with him, and bring down a storm of angry words from my father, and raise a host of unfounded fears and suspicions in my mother's breast? Better not, I thought; so I contented myself with simply saying, "Well, I don't know much."

"Well, the less the better, Cissy." And my father's brow darkened as he added, "An' mind ye, bairns, if ever ane o' ye disgrace yoursel's sae far as to tak up wi' ane o' these ne'er-do-weels, ye may look for a hame whaur ye like, for ye winna get one here."

There was a few minutes' silence after this speech of my father's, during which my feelings were none of the pleasantest. He had, with all his good common sense and universal kindness, a few hobbies on which, when excited, he could exercise neither sense nor reason, and this was one of them. I believe he meant what he said when he threatened to turn us out of doors if we should venture to form an intimacy with an officer, and with this belief how should I act toward Captain

Moreton if he should wish or attempt to follow up our slight acquaintance. While, with bowed head, I was ruminating on this bitter thought, the silence was broken by Susie asking, with an air of self-reliance, "Isn't the Earl of Kinkeld an officer, papa?"

"Oh ay, that he is; but he's ane o' the right stamp; nane o' your stay-at-hame make-believe chaps; he has fought for his country, Susie, my leddy, an' has given an' got, too, if I'm not mistaken, some hard knocks; ay, there's waur men in the world, Tory though he is, than the Earl of Kinkeld."

"Papa," asked little Jim, who had been listening open-mouthed to all the talk about the Earl; "papa, will the Earl wear a red-velvet gown to-morrow?"

This was the signal for a general laugh, at which poor Jim looked distressed; while my father said gravely, "You needna laugh at the bairn; I mind the time mysel' when I thought the king was aye dressed in a grand velvet gown trimmed wi' gold lace, an' a great gold crown on his head. I mind, when I was a wee callant, I used to wonder how he got owre the stiles!"

This was irresistible, and in the laugh that followed my father joined. Other reminiscences of his childhood flooded back on his memory; one story after another was told to listening ears and hearts which had not learned yet to weary of hear-

ing "what papa did when he was a boy," and when he wound up with a quickly suppressed sigh, and said, "Ay, bairns, these were happy days," I moved silently to the piano, and gave expression to the pent-up feelings of his heart by playing "Auld Lang Syne," in the chorus of which every one joined, from my father down to little Jim. Every cloud, every shadow seemed now to have fled, and when we finished, and when, flinging himself back in his arm chair, and drawing a long, full sigh of happiness, he exclaimed, "There's nae place like home," every heart in his family re-echoed his words—"There's no place like home!" ay, and a good and bright day will it be for our beloved country when every father, son, husband, brother, can do the same, and say, "There's no place like home!"

Next morning, much to our amazement, papa appeared at breakfast in his Sunday suit of superfine black cloth; and on me saying in a tone of surprise, "Why, papa, you're dressed!" he replied, "Yes, lassie, I ken I am; an' I think its just right and proper-like that when a man like the Earl is going to honour my house with a visit, the head of it should at least make himself decent like."

"But do you think you have any chance of seeing him?" I asked.

"I canna say; it's just possible, and it's just mair than probable that I may meet his carriage,

an' of course, Tory though he is, I maun gie him a hat."

I could scarcely help smiling at my dear father's simplicity; it was easy to be seen he was both pleased and proud of the promised visit; and indeed, to tell the truth, whatever we might say to the contrary, we were all proud of it, for human nature, however infinitely it may vary in its finer and subtler shades, is in its broad, general outlines universally the same.

"You don't intend to wear that ugly grey dress, Cecile?" said Aggie in an audible whisper.

"And why not?" answered saucy Susie, "the Earl's only a man!"

Shaking my head at Susie, I said quietly, "No, Aggie dear, I shall change it after breakfast."

"Ay, do that, do that, like a good lassie," said my father, stroking me on the head fondly as he prepared to go, "honour to whom honour is due; an' see an' behave yoursel'." A slight toss of my head at this arrested his attention, and he continued, "You needna take an advice from your father amiss, Cissy; dear me, it's no mony years since I could take you under my arm, an' now you're near as big as mysel'. What'll ever things come to! an' just to think o' an earl coming to visit a daughter o' mine!" And he left the room; but scarcely had he crossed the threshold, when he returned to say, "An' by the by, Cissy, dinna forget to say, Yes, my lord, an' No, your lordship;

an' if I don't meet his *lordship*" (laying a particular stress upon the new word) "mysel', ye'll gie me a' the news when I come hame."

After breakfast, preparations began in earnest. A large fire was made in the drawing-room, and Jenny—neat, tidy, little Jenny,—duster in hand, was clearing away every speck of that housewife's nuisance, dust. I went up stairs and began to dress with much care, indeed with by far too much; but I knew nothing at that time of the really simple habits of our aristocracy, all my knowledge of it being drawn from books or newspaper accounts of balls and levées. Before eleven o'clock I descended to the drawing-room attired in a rich lavender silk, which I had worn only once before; fortunately my good taste prevented me from making myself ridiculous by the use of ornaments: a black velvet belt, bracelets, and a small cross of brilliants suspended from a narrow black velvet ribbon, being the only things of the kind I wore.

My mother was in the drawing-room, dressed in her never failing company dress—black satin, and crimson crape shawl—and, seated in an easy chair, knitting in hand, felt, and therefore looked, as much at home as in any corner of the house. How I envied her! I was restless, fidgetty, uneasy. When I moved, my dress rustled, and its rustling annoyed me; I arranged and re-arranged the ornaments on the table, walked from one window

to another, till at last my mother said, "Don't you think, Cecile dear, you had better take your work and sit down?"

"Well, perhaps, mamma; I wonder when he'll come." And I commenced rummaging in a work-box for a bit of ornamental work. At last I selected a half finished silk purse, and set about it in earnest; but alas, I soon found that I was working the pattern up side down, and flung it aside in disgust on the couch, thinking in my heart that this was the most miserable day in my life! What trifles constitute misery sometimes! Ah, little did I know then what misery really was, but the cup was even now preparing which, full and brimming over, I must drain to the bitter dregs!

Twelve o'clock! The door bell rang, I caught at my discarded work again; voices in the lobby, and presently the drawing-room door was thrown open, and in a loud and somewhat important tone Jenny announced—"Mrs Brodie!" Our little housemaid was evidently practising.

Mrs Brodie looked astonished. She glanced eagerly and questioningly round the room, and then from my mother to me while the usual salutations were made, her yellow eye asking meantime the cause of all this state. I could scarcely help smiling at her look of speechless curiosity; but from a fear of being thought vain about the Earl's visit determined to refrain speaking about it till

in the course of conversation it should come out naturally. Nor had I long to wait.

"Well, Cecile, you are quite smart this morning, and looking very well. I was afraid, as you did not come to see me yesterday, that your romantic adventure at the review had laid you up. 'All's well that ends well,' we know, but it was a mad-like thing for you to do; it was a wonder you were not killed."

My mother started; but I said simply, "What nonsense, Mrs Brodie, there was no danger to me, I knew well what I was about."

"It's very well for you to say so; but we on-lookers know better. At one time you were in as great danger from the horses' feet as Lady Blanche herself."

"Then my guardian angel protected me, I suppose," I said smiling.

"Your guardian angel then has made you quite a heroine of romance."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, Captain Moreton was raving about you yesterday, and he says you were publicly toasted at mess the day before."

I gave Mrs Brodie an admonitory glance, and looked at my mother. But it was too late, for she said, "While I cannot but rejoice that Cecile did her duty to a fellow-creature, yet, if what you say be true, Mrs Brodie, I am afraid there will be much cause to regret this occurrence. If there is

one thing I would dread for Cecile, or any of my daughters, more than another, it is notoriety."

This remark of my mother's was rather a check-mate to Mrs Brodie, who was silent for a minute; then her eye falling on my flowers, she exclaimed, "What a magnificent bouquet!—all hot-house flowers, I declare! Where did you get them, Cecile?"

"Ah, that's a secret! You must try and guess."

"Oh, I never could guess, unless you've bought them,—have you?"

I shook my head. "No, I had them sent a present yesterday, from—from—can you guess now?"

"Yes, yes; from Cap—."

To prevent such guessing I interrupted hastily, "From the Earl of Kinkeld."

"From the Earl of Kinkeld!" she repeated in astonishment; "dear me, Cecile, you're in luck!"

"Yes; and he comes to thank her in person to-day," said mamma.

Mrs Brodie's yellow eyes emitted a strange variety of lights as she heard this, and listened to the explanation which followed. At last she said, "Dear me, I quite envy you; I wish I had been at your side of the phaeton."

"But you would not have done anything so *mad-like*," I said, smiling.

This was too much of a home-thrust. I did not wish to annoy, but they who indulge in witty

retorts play with edged weapons. An angry flush rose to Mrs Brodie's cheek; to soothe and conciliate her I bethought me of the other half of my present, and said, "Come with me into the dining-room, I wish to shew you something," and, without waiting an answer, led the way at once. She followed as I expected, and, flinging open the door, I allowed her to enter.

"What is it? oh, yes, I see; another present, Cecile?" as her eye fell on the basket of fruit standing on the sideboard.

"No, not another, a part of the first," I replied, "but I thought it better to be in here."

"Certainly, you're quite right. What beautiful strawberries," she exclaimed, as she daintily lifted one and began examining it, while her eyes and mouth had a somewhat watery expression.

"Yes, beautiful, ar'n't they? Eat it."

"Thank you; but I can scarcely venture. Do you know each of these is worth about a guinea?"

"What; nonsense! Eat it, I tell you."

Mrs Brodie required no more. She held aloft the great, bright, scarlet berry with her finger and thumb, and then it disappeared within the pearly gates for ever. Another, and another, and another!

"Oh, Cecile, I forgot; I'm eating them all. Won't you have some? or, perhaps, you've had some."

"I! oh no; I never thought of eating them, they are so pretty!"

"The prettier the better. What a little goose you are; there, take *one*."

I shook my head. "I like seeing you eat them."

"Well, you're the strangest girl in the world. But I am not going to decline *Ego*, so I shan't have any more. I say, Cecile, I wonder you're not afraid to leave that basket there."

"Why?" I asked in some astonishment.

"Because your little brothers or the servants may steal them."

"Steal them! Oh, Mrs Brodie, they would never think of such a thing."

"Indeed; how do you make them so good? Do you thrash them?"

"No; what good would that do?"

"Well that's strange; when I was a child I used to steal everything nice that came to the house, and didn't I catch such thrashings."

"And did they do you any good?"

"Not a bit; they made me a great deal worse."

"Well, why should I thrash my brothers?"

"I don't know," she replied, with an air of nonchalance and a shrug of her shoulders; "I suppose because it's the fashion. These are really very good strawberries."

"Miss Cecile," said Jenny, entering, "dinner's been laid in the parlour; and Missis says she will be glad if Mrs Brodie will stay and take a bit of cold beef, for there's nothing else, you see, as Missis thought it would not do to be making a

fuss, and having a smell of dinner in the house, when his lordship, ye see, might pop in any time."

"Oh, the Earl won't be here for a couple of hours yet, Jenny, so you need not be alarmed on that score," said Mrs Brodie.

Jenny looked crestfallen, and I said, "How do you know?"

"Why, quite well; these great people seldom if ever visit before luncheon."

"Oh dear, I wish I had known," I said, "I would not have put on this dress before dinner."

"What nonsense! Your dress won't be any worse, and you'll feel all the more at home in it."

"Well, perhaps you're right. Will you come to dinner?"

"To be sure I'm right; but I won't stay dinner to-day, thank you. I must go home, and attend to the comfort of my round-shouldered spouse. I say, Cecile, what would I give for your chances; but it's always the way of the world. People who can play their cards well seldom have the chance; and simple, straightforward, conscientious little fools like you have more chances than they know what to do with! Good bye, dear, I'll get the news to-morrow."

After dinner, my mother and I repaired once more to the drawing-room, to await our expected guest; but the time now passed swiftly, and I was progressing with my purse quite to my satisfaction, when a peal, which none but Jenny's friend

could have given, resounded through the house. Immediately our little house-maid, with cheeks as red as her cherry-coloured ribbons, announced, "The Earl of Kinkeld," and the "Honourable Captain Moreton." I started at the latter name, but fortunately managed to preserve my composure. Of course we both rose; but the Earl, passing me, went up at once to my mother, and holding out his hand, said, "Mrs Raye, I presume? Allow me to introduce myself; and my young friend here, my nephew, Captain Moreton; he tells me he has the pleasure of your daughter's acquaintance."

My mother threw a glance of anxious inquiry at me, which was not lost upon the young officer. "Yes," he immediately replied, "I had the pleasure of meeting Miss Raye some time ago in Mr Brodie's studio, but I have no doubt it was a matter of such small importance in her estimation, that she did not think of mentioning it," and the gallant captain bit his lip.

"Is that the case, Miss Raye?" said the Earl, smiling, as he shook hands with me; "if so, I can assure you it's not generally the way. Young ladies are rather proud of an introduction to the only son of Lord Belraven," and there was a touch of sarcasm in his voice as he spoke.

The Earl was an elderly man, tall, spare, and of soldierly bearing. In youth he must have been fine-looking, for the shape of his head, over the crown of which his sparse gray hairs were care-

fully brushed, was well-formed, and his features good; but a sword-cut, received in the Peninsula, extending from his temple to his mouth, completely destroyed the expression of his face. His breeding, which partook of the stately polish of the old school, was nevertheless agreeable, and his manners genial. He took a chair near me, and I was astonished to find myself, in the course of a few minutes, conversing with him, not only with perfect ease, but with all the freedom of an equal.

As soon as I had an opportunity, I asked for Lady Blanche.

"Oh, she will soon be quite well; a few bruises, and nothing more, thanks to your intrepidity, Miss Raye."

"And the wound on her temple?" I asked.

"A mere scratch. It will be healed without leaving a scar, the doctor says."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" I said.

"Yes, and I too. I feared at one time that she would have to bear her old father company," and he pointed, smiling, to his hideous scar. But dropping his voice, he continued in a grave tone, "Seriously, Miss Raye, for it is not a subject for joke, the doctor says another kick on the same spot would have proved fatal. I consider then, that, under God, her life is due to you. She is my only child—all that remains to me of a dear and early lost wife. How can I ever repay you?" His voice grew thick. Involuntarily he clasped his hands.

I respected his emotion, and, with eyes bent on the ground, sat silent.

In a minute or two Captain Moreton, who had been leaning against the mantelpiece, looking as handsome as handsome could be, adroitly gave a new turn to the subject, by saying, "I have often wondered how you happened to see the accident so quickly, Miss Raye?"

"It would have been impossible for me not to see it; I had been watching Lady Blanche for some time." And then deeming some explanation necessary, I added, naïvely, "I like pretty things and pretty people."

Both the gentlemen smiled, and the conversation once more became general.

On rising to go, the Earl, glancing round our luxuriously furnished drawing-room, said, "Miss Raye, I'm almost selfish enough to wish that your father were in circumstances which would permit me to offer you a substantial expression of my regard. As it is, you will do me the favour to accept this keepsake, as a remembrance of the service you have rendered to me and mine." And he drew, as he spoke, a casket from his pocket, unclosed the lid, and displayed to my astonished eyes a magnificent set of jewels, comprising necklace, bracelets, brooch, composed of emeralds and diamonds. Emotion overcame me. But at last I said, "My Lord, I have done nothing to merit such gifts; I cannot accept them; I'm only a merchant's daughter;

such jewels are not for me: besides, I've been sufficiently rewarded." And I pointed to the flowers.

"A bouquet the compensation for my daughter's life! You don't mean to insult me, Miss Raye? But no, I'm sure you don't. Besides, *that* will fade, this never. You will not refuse an old man's gift, Miss Raye, perhaps the last he will ever make in his life, and certainly one which he never had more pleasure in bestowing. You will accept it?" He spoke so pleadingly that I had not the heart to refuse again; I bowed, and said, "Thank you, my lord, I will. But it is too much, by far too much."

"God bless you, Miss Raye. Good bye. You will come and see us when we return from town in August. If I'm not mistaken, you will yet have many an opportunity of wearing your jewels!"

And so ended the Earl's visit.

That night when I carried my treasure up to my room, and turned the beautiful jewels over for the twentieth time, always discovering new beauties in them, I could not help exclaiming, "What have I done to deserve such a gift! I would have done as much for the vilest beggar that crawls the street. Why should I be so rewarded? I shall never, never wear them." Suddenly my heart gave a great throb of delight, "I know what I'll do with them now, how nice! I'll give them a present to Aggie on her wedding day!" And with joyful step I hastened to secrete my now twice precious casket in a hidden drawer of my wardrobe.

CHAPTER XIX.

Aggie's Love Letter.

OUR parlour was the pleasantest, prettiest room in the house. It was at the back, and opened by a French window on the neatly kept small garden lawn. A white satin paper, with the most delicate wreaths of soft pink roses, adorned the walls, and the window was draped with chintz curtains, lined with the same delicate tint. Being small, however, it was very seldom used for family purposes; and except by Aggie, with whom it was a favourite resort, especially in summer when no extra fire was needed, was rarely visited.

It happened one forenoon, in "leafy June," when the earth still rejoiced in the fresh fair greenness of early summer, that I had occasion to enter this room in search of a book which had been mislaid. To my astonishment I saw Aggie seated at a little table near the window, her head buried

in her hands, and an open letter lying before her. On hearing me enter, she started up and clutched the letter in her hand, while her face wore an expression almost of terror. I had no wish to force myself into her confidence, and I said soothingly, "It's only me, Aggie dear; don't mind me, I'm going immediately." "Oh, don't go, Cecile," she cried beseechingly; "you are the very person I have been most wishing to see since ever I got—got this," and she pointed to the letter, "and yet I did not like to come to you."

As she spoke I approached, and, throwing my arms round her neck, kissed her, and said, "Aggie, something is vexing you terribly. Will you tell me what it is, and then perhaps you'll be better?" And by a strange coincidence my memory flew back to a night nearly two years ago when I had used almost the same words.

Aggie did not answer for some minutes, but she wept freely and unrestrainedly on my breast. At last making an effort at composure, she said, "I don't know what you will think of my conduct, Cecile, but I'm awfully upset; read—read that." And withdrawing herself from my arms, she put the letter in my hand.

I took it with some curiosity; but no sooner did I glance at the writing than I recognised the writer, and my heart began to beat violently. Feeling that Aggie's eyes were on me, I took the precaution of turning my back to the window as I read.

The letter, as you anticipate, was from Frank; it was dated from the "Cape of Good Hope," and ran as follows:—

"My own dear little Aggie,—Though this is the first letter I've ever written to you, I know you will not be angry at me addressing you thus, and why? because your dear gentle heart has long been mine. You will believe me when I say that I make this statement without any feeling of coxcombry or vanity. You may ask, Why make it then? Simply for this, that but for my knowledge of the fact, this letter never would have been written.

"Aggie, with all the strength of a first love, I loved your sister, your noble sister Cecile. She returned my affection, and I ardently—God knows how ardently—looked forward to the time when I should make her my wife.

"But an unexpected obstacle arose. Cecile discovered that the sister she had cherished and loved from childhood, the sister, I believe, for whom she would willingly lay down her life, had, almost unknown to herself, bestowed her young affections also on me (alas, what was I, to merit the love of two such women?) and under such circumstances Cecile, the noble, the generous, felt there was no alternative but to give me up, to wrench out the love which I believe had entwined its strong tendrils round every fibre of her

heart. This was her decision then. 'We were never to meet till we could meet as brother and sister, and nothing more.' You may be sure I did not acquiesce quietly in this decision, but my special pleading was of no avail. Cecile had not come to it without counting the cost, and I read determination to carry it out in her voice, in her eye, in the very agony she endured. Stunned and stupefied though I was, when I left that night, I left the house with a resolution never to return, for I was convinced, deeply convinced, that Cecile's love never—never could be mine.

"Many a long day and weary night did I pace the deck, cursing the cruel fate that had thus come between me and the woman I adored, and many a time did the temptation arise to fling myself overboard, and put an end for ever to the pangs of an aching heart. Wicked, foolish thought! but better days were about to dawn. A bit of blue broke through a rift in my stormy sky; a rainbow shone in my cloud; a voice whispered, 'Is Cecile's sacrifice then to go for nought? her self-denial to reap no reward? shall she alone set the example of magnanimity?' Aggie! from the moment my heart answered these questions, my duty was clear—to wean my affection from Cecile, and to fix it on you. *Duty!* tremble not at the harsh word, my sweetest, gentlest Aggie, for what duty could be more pleasing than learning to love you? O Aggie! when I think of you and your

winning ways, I sometimes wonder I did not choose you from the first. And yet I would not have had it so; the heart wants discipline, Aggie, and I've no doubt both Cecile and I will be better, purer, and nobler, for this sacrifice we have made —for this trial we have undergone. 'They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.' Do you believe this, darling? I do. Oh, how happy we shall be in loving one another! And how happy will our noble Cecile be in securing the happiness of those she loves best. This is a strange love letter, dear Aggie, is it not? But you understand everything now. I shall not come to Dunearn this summer yet, for reasons which you will sympathize with. But you will think of me, Aggie; and if God spares me, I will come the next to claim my affianced bride!

"FRANK."

And this was the letter! No wonder poor Aggie should have been "awfully upset." Even I, to whom most of it was an old story, had been stirred to the innermost recesses of my heart, and it was all new, strangely new to her! After I had finished, I held it still in my hand for some minutes, pretending to read while I strove to control the quivering muscles of my face. At last, having gained sufficient command over myself, I returned it, saying calmly, "There, it's all right at last." Then kissing her, I added, "You are happy now, Aggie?"

"Happy? yes, how happy! But oh, Cecile, what vexes, what annoys me, is that I have no right to be happy after robbing a sister, and such a sister, of her happiness. Cecile, why did you never tell me this before?"

"It would have served no good purpose, Aggie. Now, dearest, listen to me: unless you really wish to make me miserable, you must never talk nor even think of 'robbing me of my happiness again.' Besides, it's not true, Aggie; I don't think I ever was happier than at the present moment. Things have come about exactly as I wished and prayed they would, but as I dared scarcely venture to anticipate. Now kiss me, Aggie, and be a good girl, and believe every word I say, for it is quite true."

She flung her arms round my neck and kissed me again and again, on cheek, brow, and lip, "O Cecile, I shall never find words to thank you!"

"Well, don't try. Kiss me again instead."

"But, Cecile, you must have suffered terribly."

"Rather, pray don't remind me of it; it's all over now."

"I wonder I did not notice it or know of it."

"I suspect you did; I was told you were one of my most devoted nurses."

A look of horror passed over Aggie's face. "Cecile, you don't mean to say that frightful fever was the result, when we thought you should have died? But yes it was, I see it all, remember it all now, and that night when you left the house

and returned in a fit of delirium, which the doctor said was the beginning of the fever, was the very night you parted with Frank!"

"It was. But, as I have already told you, these are things of the past, things which I would wish buried in the sea of oblivion for ever, never mentioned even to our dearest and nearest; you understand me, Aggie?"

"Perfectly, Cecile, dear; I shall never, never mention them to any one."

"Not even to Frank when you are his wife?" I said archly. "I declare, you little puss, you'll be married before me, and I'll have to dance at your wedding in green slippers!" And then, strange to say, I drew a deep sigh. Was it ominous?

"Cecile, would you mind me shewing this letter to mamma? I feel as if I ought to do so."

"Certainly, you ought to do so. I never told her anything of our engagement; but it was such a mere boy and girl affair, and I rather think she had a shrewd guess at the true state of matters."

"And about the fever?"

"No, no; she had no idea as to the cause of it; this letter may suggest the idea, but I would rather, much rather, it should not."

"Well, Cecile, I shall take it at once."

"Do; it will be a great relief and consolation to you. O Aggie, what would we do without our mother!"

CHAPTER XX.

Kinkeld House.

ABOUT the end of August the aristocratic chariot of the Earl of Kinkeld might once more have been seen at our door, and Jenny and the tall footman indulging in a species of quiet, innocent flirtation during the absence of their superiors.

This visit of the Earl and Lady Blanche was the first intimation we had had of their return from London, and took us somewhat by surprise. Our surprise was increased, however, when we learned the object of their visit, which was to take me back with them to Kinkeld House. My mother, evidently, did not quite see her way to allowing me to accept this invitation, for she made as many objections as civility would permit, and did everything but say "No."

Lady Blanche, however, would take no refusal, and her father seconded everything she said so

cordially, that my mother was at last obliged to give a somewhat reluctant consent.

It was with a species of tremor that I felt myself handed in to the carriage by the Earl, but a tremor not unmixed with delight. In spite of a few doubts and misgivings, the idea of spending some days in a nobleman's mansion, of wandering through stately parks, of gazing upon grand old paintings, was inexpressibly pleasant to my mind.

Kinkeld House was about six miles distant from Dunearn, and the drive to it lay through one of the loveliest of Scotland's straths. Now from the summit of a rising ground, a panoramic view of country lay at our feet; and villages, churches, farm-houses, trees, woods, and mountains steeped in misty warmth, and bathed in the golden light of an August sun, spread out before the eye in every direction, while silver-threaded tributaries of our noble river wound and twisted in their serpentine course ere they reached its placid bosom; and anon, descending, our view, confined and limited, seized the minutest details, and could have painted with pre-Raphaelite accuracy, on the one side, the lofty hill, clad to its summit with trees whose foliage autumn was tinting with yellow, amber, red, and brown; and, on the other, the harvest-field with its golden barley half cut down, with its sturdy, bronzed reapers, its sickles which glittered and flashed in the sun, and its scarlet-kerchiefed women.

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And the aristocratic carriage bowled along, and the sky was blue, the air sweet, warblings from unseen songsters filled the ear, and I, Cecile Raye, sat beside Lady Blanche Drummond, and talked to her, and to her father, the Earl, who sat opposite, as if I had known them all my life!

Soon I stood upon the marble-paved hall of Kinkeld house. Dear old house, how strangely unfamiliar then, how pleasantly familiar *now*, is every room, chamber, hall, and closet, within thy venerable walls! How little we foresee the future! If any one had told me *then* that for many a year I should reign as mistress in that lordly mansion, I would have laughed the false prophet to scorn. And yet—and yet—!

After being introduced to Lady Charlotte Murray, a widow, and a distant relation of the Earl's, who presided over his household, and chaperoned his fair young daughter, Lady Blanche conducted me herself to my room—a sweet, pleasant apartment adjoining hers, and communicating with her dressing-room. After chatting away for a few minutes, she got up, and said, "Well, I shall leave you now to dress for dinner; the gong sounded, I believe, before we returned. I shall send Ross to assist you."

Dress for dinner! Here was a plight. How could I dress without a single change of wardrobe. Arrangements had been made, I knew, to send the dog-cart in the evening for necessary articles of

clothing, but I scarcely thought it was yet despatched. In this dilemma I sat down and meditated a few minutes, and at last a good idea crossed my mind.

The dress I was wearing—the lavender silk, which was still my best, my very best—was made in a style, not uncommon in those days, which rendered it serviceable either for morning or evening wear. Remembering this, I speedily disrobed, and, with the aid of a small pen-knife, commenced ripping out the inserted piece which formed the high body, and was successfully performing the same operation on the long sleeves, when rat-tat at the door made me start, as if I had been engaged in a deed of guilt. I made no answer, but pulled away lustily at a long thread, which, thanks to dressmakers' sewing, was coming out nicely, when the rat-tatting was repeated. In despair, I called "Come in," and a waiting-maid entered. She saw at a glance what I had been about, but was too well trained to make any remark. "I have brought you some hot water, miss; can I assist you in any way?" and, without waiting an answer, she disappeared with the jug of hot water through another door. Immediately she returned, "Now what can I do for you, miss?"

"Nothing, thank you; I only want a little water in a basin," and I looked inquiringly round the room.

"You will find everything of that kind in the

dressing-room, miss," she said somewhat superciliously. "You will please ring when you want me, miss."

"And that won't be in a hurry," I mentally added; "I am glad I'm independent of the services of such a girl as you."

Scarcely had I finished dressing, before Lady Blanche entered, attired in a simple white muslin dress, and looking so sweet and pretty, with a simple china rose fastened in her fair hair, that I made an apology for my heavy dress.

"Your dress is very nice—too good, I should say. I always wear muslin from motives of economy. If a gentleman should send the leg of a goose in my lap, why, I could laugh without being vexed," and she laughed a musical little laugh. "But stop, there are some finishing touches wanting," and she commenced pulling me about, adjusting my tucker, and arranging and re-arranging the folds of my dress. "Now, that will do, I think. Has Ross not been here?"

"Yes, but—" and the colour rose to my cheek.

"You dispensed with her services. Is that it?" she asked kindly. "She was not rude, I hope?"

"Oh no, no; I really did not require her."

The young lady smiled; "You want something to brighten your hair; no, not to brighten; one can't brighten gold," she added, with her sweet smile again, "but to adorn. I have something in my room. Wait a minute."

Presently she returned, with a bouquet of flowers in her hand, and commenced pulling it to pieces, trying first one sprig, and then another, in my hair, and laying each aside in its turn, with a dissatisfied air. At last she said, "No, it won't do; it's no use trying; what suits the hair won't suit the dress. Miss Raye, why do you wear lavender?"

"I have no particular reason," I replied, "but I think it a delicate, pretty colour."

"It is; but, unfortunately, what suits it won't suit your hair. Shades of pink and scarlet are just the thing for lavender, but somehow or other they don't seem to suit this mass of rippling gold," and she lifted my hair gently with her hand as she spoke. "But come, we shall just leave the gold to take care of itself, and this pretty bouquet shall brighten—I'm right this time—the lavender;" and the deft, white, tapering fingers speedily reconstructed the bouquet, which she placed easily and gracefully in the front of my low dress. "Now *that* will do," she continued, her face brightening up; then she added, "You may wonder, Miss Raye, at me making such a fuss about flowers, but papa likes to see them worn; his dinner tastes sweeter, he says. Now this may only be an old man's whim, but it is at least poetical, and easily gratified."

"Are you fond of poetry?" I asked.

"Oh, very!" Our eyes met; it was enough.

"I think we had better go down to the drawing-room," she said. And, slipping her arm round my waist, we glided down the broad polished oaken staircase like two sisters.

On entering the drawing-room, we found the Earl, and Lady Charlotte Murray, and only one stranger there—Captain Moreton! But I soon found that he was not looked upon as a stranger, but rather as one of the family. What singular fatality was it that threw this man, handsome in person, fascinating in manners, continually in my way? He came forward saying, "This is an unexpected pleasure, Miss Raye;" and we shook hands at once. Indeed, we were no longer strangers. Although he had never called at my father's house again, still we had met, by chance or design, almost daily in my long summer rambles with Mrs Brodie; and I, forgetful of a father's threat and a mother's prayer, had found an unspeakable pleasure in the society of the fascinating officer. "There was no danger, could be none to me," so I argued; "the power to love had been scorched out of me; yes, I was sure it had." And so, I have said, we had met almost daily; and had sauntered by the side of the murmuring river, through shady groves, sat at the foot of foaming waterfalls; and now I was paying a most unexpected visit to the Earl of Kinkeld, and lo! here he was.

The evening slipped away pleasantly and quietly. After dinner we returned, of course, to the draw-

ing room. "Aunty," as Lady Blanche familiarly called her titled relative, played chess with the Earl; and Lady Blanche, Captain Moreton, and myself, repaired to the piano; where, all three being fond, passionately I might say, of music, we contributed in turn to the amusement of the others. Captain Moreton sung several duets with Lady Blanche, and quite astonished me with the quality of his voice—rich, deep, sonorous,—a voice, once heard, not likely to be forgotten. And as I listened, I could not forbear asking myself, "How came this man to be possessed of such wondrous gifts—a handsome person, fascinating manners, fine voice, unbounded wealth? Any one of them would have been enough for one individual; but nature, like fortune, is often capricious, and generally lavish in her gifts. She despises, ignores the "rights of equality;" and mentally, morally, physically produces peer or peasant, prince or beggar.

In little more than an hour, Captain Moreton left to return to town; Lady Blanche picked up her work, a good strong stocking, which considerably upset my notions of an aristocratic lady's work; and I looked on while the Earl and Lady Charlotte played chess. The Earl evidently had not "a foeman worthy of his steel," for he had already gained no fewer than six games! Just as I came up, Lady Charlotte had placed her "queen," by a rash move, in check at once by a "bishop" and a

"knight," and I could not refrain saying, "Take care, Lady Charlotte, look at your queen!" The Earl looked quickly up; "Do you know chess, Miss Raye?"

"I know the moves," I replied quietly.

"Then that is more than I do, at least to-night," said Lady Charlotte; "will you kindly take my place, and I shall finish my new novel?"

"Do, Miss Raye," said the Earl; "take pity upon me; I never get a good game except when Mr Sinclair, our worthy minister, is here. Which do you take, 'white' or 'red'?"

"White, thank you." And the game began in earnest. Whether the Earl expected to find in me a second Lady Charlotte; or whether my tactics were entirely new to him, I cannot tell, but, somewhat to his amazement, he speedily found himself "checkmated," and a little excited he exclaimed, "This will never do, Miss Raye, you have out-generalled a general; we must have another!"

"With pleasure," I said; the pieces were speedily rearranged, and once more we engaged in our mimic war. The Earl, however, was determined not to be out-generalled this time; and the game might have lasted till midnight, but the gong sounding for prayers, we were obliged to declare it drawn; and thus ended my *first* evening in "Kinkeld House."

CHAPTER XXI.

Lady Blanche and her Friends.

NEXT morning was devoted, by Lady Blanche, to taking me over the house, and shewing me the many fine paintings and objects of "vertu" it contained. From the long oval-shaped dining-room, with its handsome crimson hangings, polished carved oak furniture, and quaint old Flemish paintings (principally drinking pieces, which gave me little interest), we passed into the rich beautiful drawing-room, draped with amber, and full of a warm golden light. The walls were almost entirely covered with fine paintings, many of them of great value, and a few belonging to the famous Venetian school; while vases, porcelain and china, from the most renowned manufacturers in the world, were placed in every available space. This was fairyland to me. At that time crystal palaces, art exhibitions, and such things were not dreamed of, save perhaps

by the noble young prince to whom, a short year before, our fair Queen had plighted her womanly troth, and who now, in regal widowhood, mourns his loss, the loss of one "whose sun went down while it was yet day." Cheap trips, too, were things unknown; and the honest, hard-working artizan of the present day has more opportunities of seeing collected together the marvels of nature and art, than had the wealthy middle-classes of five and twenty years ago. I had never before then seen such a collection; and I daresay my enthusiasm amused Lady Blanche considerably. At the same time, however, I could see that she was also pleased. She gave me detailed accounts of every painting that struck my fancy; told me the painter's name, history, the circumstances under which his picture was supposed to have been done, what it cost, where it was picked up, and other details, trifling in their minuteness some might think, but to *me* inexpressibly touching, inexpressibly dear. And Lady Blanche, with sympathetic intuitiveness, understood and comprehended this.

"Yes," she said, as she drew my attention to a handsome vase of Dresden china, "I see it's true. You *do* like pretty things and pretty people."

I coloured, as I thought of my words being repeated, and especially when I remembered their connection. It was quite true, nevertheless, so I allowed the remark to pass in silence; and her

ladyship continued, "*Apropos* of pretty people, what do you think of cousin Gerald?"

"I don't think I have the pleasure of knowing him," I replied.

"Oh yes, you have. Now come, don't be stupid; you know Captain Moreton; do you think him handsome?"

"Captain Moreton! yes; but I did not know that his name was Gerald."

"And now that you do know, have you any objection?" said Lady Blanche, smiling. "You seem disappointed."

"Why, no, there is no reason for me being so; but somehow or other I always form associations with names. Gerald! a very pretty name too; but I never thought of Captain Moreton having any other name at all."

"Yes, but you see he has; Gerald Moreton! A very euphonious name too, I think. And now for an answer to my question; do you think him handsome?"

"Very; nobody could deny that. Figure tall and commanding, slight, but muscular; nose, brow, chin, and mouth, after the old classic style; what more could one have? And yet his greatest charm, in my opinion, lies in the combination of the full blue eyes with the raven hair; it is such a rare thing to see a blue eye with black lashes and eyebrows."

"You speak *con amore*, Miss Raye," said Lady

Blanche, smiling; "shall I communicate your opinions to Captain Moreton?"

"Well, that would scarcely be fair," I said, returning her smile, though I felt my colour rising. "You see I was speaking of Captain Moreton not exactly as a man, but as a picture—as a statue—as a—a—"

"Work of art, in short," said Lady Blanche. "But if I were Aunty," she continued, with her sweet smile, "I should say that such admiration on the part of a young lady of eighteen for a handsome man of eight-and-twenty was somewhat dangerous."

"How?" and then, without waiting an answer, I added, "But I'm more than eighteen, I'm almost twenty."

"Two years older than me! I wouldn't have thought it; but I don't see that the danger is lessened by that. If you had been forty, or sixty, it might have done!" This idea seemed so comical to both of us, that we both took a good school-girl laugh, and Captain Moreton, much to my relief, was allowed to drop.

After luncheon, we walked down to the village, which lay outside the gates along the side of the public road, and about half a mile from the house. Lady Blanche took a small reticule over her arm, and said, "Now I'm going to take you to visit some of my friends in our village."

"Some pensioners, I suppose?"

"Oh no," she replied quickly, "papa has neither pensioners nor paupers on his estate; he does not think them necessary." She spoke with her usual smile; but somehow I felt reproved, and walked on in silence. We took a short cut through the parks, glancing, as we passed, at the variety of tints on some fine old elms, tossing aside with our parasols a few brown leaves prematurely cut down, and scaring for an instant the timid sheep from their quiet grazing, and the village was reached.

It was not a model village, nor a fancy village, but it was what, unfortunately, was rare in Scotland in those days, a very clean village. The houses were commonplace enough, but wore a comfortable air, and were for the most part whitewashed. Every cottage had its little patch of flower garden in front, and its larger vegetable garden behind; and many of them were adorned with climbing roses, or with the less showy but more profitable pear and apple tree. There was an old-world air about the place, an air of drowsy stillness, broken only, and not unmusically, by the regular sound of a hammer, as the blacksmith drove nail after nail into the shoe of a strong patient-looking horse. There was this smith-shop, of course, a cartwright's, and a small shop kept by an old man no longer able for manual labour in the fields, and whose small window displayed a few loaves of bread, a small bunch of tallow candles, and a specimen of raw sugar, which might

have been sand, but for the swarm of flies and two regal wasps that were vouching for its authenticity. There was no public-house in the village, nor, indeed, anywhere on the Earl's property; he seemed to have as great a dislike at public-houses as at pensioners and paupers. Social science was not known, or at least not talked about, in those days; but it is just possible that there may have been some connection in the Earl's mind between public-houses, pensioners, and paupers.

Many of the doors were shut; most of the men and women, and even children, being at work in the harvest fields; but one or two stood open, and into the first open door Lady Blanche entered.

It was a humble-looking apartment, but its bare floor, deal table, and little grate were scrupulously clean. Two soft, comfortable-looking beds were fitted up in recesses in the wall, and my attention was instantly arrested by their counterpanes, which were composed of patchwork arranged and put together with wonderful taste and patience. In a corner beside the window, where she could enjoy the warmth of the sun, sat an old woman in an easy chair propped up with pillows. She was a poor paralytic, and could not move or help herself in any way. Yet she was happy, you could see that from the air of serenity which reposed on her withered face. In this cottage she had been born, here she had reared her family, and here she would die. There was no workhouse in store for

her. Her son and his thrifty Jeanie would die with shame were the parish even to offer anything for her support; and so the good old woman had no care for the future—no care but to look forward to that bright and glorious land where her Saviour was preparing a place for her.

When Lady Blanche entered, and going up took hold of her poor helpless hand, she said, "Ah, my leddy, it gladdens my auld een to see ye here again. I thocht the time unco lang when you were awa in that big Lunnun toon; no that I hae onything to complain o', for every body's kinder to me than I deserve; but when you come ye're just like a glint o' sunshine to my auld heart."

Lady Blanche smiled a smile so serene, so bright, that I did not wonder at old Betty's liking, and said, "Well, I am glad I can cheer you a little; it is such a comfort to think one can increase the happiness of any one in this world. But where's Sandy? I'm afraid he's neglecting you. I caught a glimpse of him sailing a feather in the pond as I passed."

"Oh, no! Sandy's a bit good laddie; he made the fire and swung on the kettle afore he gaed oot, an' he's just a bit bairn, an' maun hae his play sometimes; an' here's wee Blanchie," pointing to a little, round, blue-eyed thing, with fair cheeks browned, and clustering golden hair burned into red patches by the sun; who, cuddled up on a stool at her feet, had escaped our observation,

"she's a good little lassie, an' waits nicely on granny; and when the kettle boils she will run an' tell Sandy to come an' make my tea; so you see, when Jeanie's in the field, I'm rael weel off."

"The kettle boils now," I said in a whisper to Lady Blanche; "might I not get her tea for her?"

"If you can; I'm sure it will gratify her."

This was enough, so I set about it at once. I had no difficulty, in this well-ordered cottage, in finding what I wanted:—the tea-pot clean and ready for use, the tea cups close beside. No time was therefore lost; and to the astonishment and delight of the old woman, who evidently considered her tea a great luxury, it was speedily set before her. A few barley scones being the only bread I saw, I was about to place them on a table, when Lady Blanche, opening her reticule, substituted a few soft biscuits instead; and ere Betty had time to express her gratification, she took from the same reticule the strong stockings which she had been finishing so industriously last night, and said, "See, Betty, this is a little present I've brought, which I hope will prove useful to your poor limbs, now that the cold weather is coming again."

"O mem, thank you, thank you! I'm sure the Lord himsel' has put it into your heart. Stockens was the only thing on earth I was needin', an' Jeanie wadna let me want them lang either, poor creature; and though she has lots of little feet to

work for, she wad gang berfit hersel' rather than let granny want for anything."

"I'm glad I've hit upon the right thing, Betty; and tell Jeanie that I'll knit another pair to change these; and don't thank me, please," she added quickly. "I have little else to do; and for all we possess, Betty, you know, time, talents, wealth, we must give an account." And pressing the big withered hand between her delicate white ones, she said, "Good bye."

"I'm afraid I've kept you rather long, Miss Raye, I'm rather selfish in these visits; I should like to pay just one more, but if you are tired we shall go home?"

"No, no; I like going with you," I said; "I like following in the wake of a sunbeam."

She tapped me playfully with her parasol, and we passed on.

The house we next visited stood at the end of the village; and, though not larger than the others, had more pretension. White muslin curtains shaded the window, which was filled with geraniums and fuschias in full bloom. The door stood open, and a gush of perfume from a plant of heliotrope met us as we entered; while a soft, low, musical voice murmured, "It is, it is my leddy; I know the rustle of her garments, the music o' her footfall." And the speaker, a tall, slight, elegant young woman, approached to meet us, guided evidently by the sound which her fine ear

had so quickly recognised. Lady Blanche led her gently back to her seat beside the flowers—her flowers, for they were the nurslings of her care.

"Are they not pretty?" she said, pointing to them as she sat down; "you can see them, my leddy, though I can't, but I *know* they are pretty for a' that, and then in a musical murmur she added, "Beautiful flowers!"

While she spoke she turned her head quickly from side to side, and an expression of uneasiness which was foreign to it passed once or twice over her serene young face.

"How stupid I am," murmured Lady Blanche to me, "she knows there's a stranger. I should have explained at once." "Jessie," she said, turning to the blind girl, "I have brought a young friend to see you, whom I love very much, and you must see her and love her too, won't you?"

The girl smiled; "Yes, I should like to see her, will she let me?" And she held out her hand.

At Lady Blanche's suggestion, I went close up to her, and laying down my bonnet on the small table, waited her inspection. In an instant the delicate finger had traced my features—had lingered lovingly over my eyes, had passed through my hair, and then Jessie said, "Thank you, I see you, I shall love you; a bonnie, bonnie leddy, with golden hair, and blue eyes that have wept—wept long ago." I started, and cried, "How do you know, how can you know? And my hair too?"

But the blind girl only shook her head and said, "I cannot tell; only I know—know." This sort of refrain she gave her words was inexpressibly pathetic, and required to be heard to be understood. Lady Blanche seeing I was affected by the girl's statement said, "Let us hope, Jessie, her tears are all wept now!"

"In this world, my leddy! Oh, no, no!" And then in the musical murmur, as if thinking aloud, she added, "There is a world where every tear shall be wiped away—away."

"Yes, Jessie," said Lady Blanche; "but I'm almost forgetting the good news I have got for you; what do you think of a large order for your lace? no fewer than twelve pieces! And I am almost afraid to tell you how rich you'll be lest it turn your poor brain; but I will tell you one thing; you will be able to get nice warm clothing for yourself and your parents, and I believe a New Testament, which you will be able to read with your own finger, into the bargain.

The blind girl clasped her hands, and raised her large sightless hazel eyes upwards in the attitude of devotion; and then she simply said, "God is very, very good, and you are made happy, my leddy, in doing His will."

"Now, Jessie," said Lady Blanche, "I must go soon; would you like me to read a few verses before I go?"

"Oh, yes, yes, about the golden streets, and the

harps, and the tree which never fades, and the river which flows from the throne of God—I can see, I can see all that."

And Lady Blanche, selecting her favourite portion, read in a clear sweet voice for some time; and then, shaking hands with the blind girl, we went away.

As we left the house, Lady Blanche said, "Yes, papa is right; his motto is, *Teach the people to help themselves;* it costs more trouble and self-denial than merely giving money, which certainly is the easiest way, but it does infinitely more good. I have been often tempted to give that poor girl a portion of the Scriptures prepared for the blind; but coming now, as the reward of her own labour, will enhance its value tenfold."

During our walk home, I learned poor Jessie's history. It was a sad, but by no means an uncommon one. A severe illness in early childhood deprived her of her sight; and sweet, gentle, amiable as she was, she threatened to prove a severe tax on her hard-working parents with their rapidly increasing family, when the idea of teaching her to weave lace was suggested. The suggestion was at once carried out; and now, added Lady Blanche, "Instead of being a burden, she is a positive help to her family."

"Who taught her to make the lace?" I asked.

"I did," replied Lady Blanche.

"You! And how did you learn?" I asked with some astonishment.

Lady Blanche smiled. "Well, it was a little bit of a frolic, I daresay; I went to Nottinghamshire on purpose; but you can't tell the pleasure I had in guiding those poor delicate fingers through the intricacies of the pattern. After going over it once, Jessie never forgot."

I glanced at Lady Blanche. My heart was very full, and the words "*In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me,*" welled up to my lips, but they were not spoken.

CHAPTER XXII.

A Revelation and a Discovery.

ONE pleasant week soon came to an end; and I was not sorry, I confess, when I learned that the Earl had written my mother, asking permission for me to prolong my stay another; nor sorry when the permission was granted.

We could scarcely expect, however, to enjoy the same pleasant quiet during the week on which we were about to enter. It was the beginning of September, and the old house was expected to be full with friends of the Earl, who were coming to enjoy the partridge shooting. We could count, however, Lady Blanche said, on the greater portion of each day; for after breakfast they all disappeared, like a covey of the poor birds they were going to shoot, and did not re-appear till instinct and fasting drove them home to dinner.

Sunday was a day of perfect calm and solemn

rest. We drove to church in the morning, listened with profit, and without yawning, to an admirable, if somewhat long sermon; spent the afternoon in quiet converse and quieter study; and in the evening, the Earl assembled his household in the large dining-room, read a portion of Scripture, made a few simple and interesting remarks upon it, sung the hundred and twentieth psalm to the tune of "French," and closed the Sunday, as he did every day in the week, with solemn prayer. An old-fashioned way of keeping the Sabbath! Yes, I grant it. The Earl was an old man even then, and not enlightened enough to dream of repudiating the Decalogue; had he heard of such a thing, I fear he would have thought we were approaching a time "*when there shall come scoffers.*" Poor old Earl!

With Monday, the 31st of August, came one arrival after another; dog-carts, dogs, horses, servants, fowling-pieces, &c., bustle, bustle, bustle, till the day closed in. Most of the Earl's guests were old men—brother officers, who had marched, bivouacked, and fought with him in many a hard-won field. There was only one young man among them, and that was his nephew, Captain Moreton!

The first of September passed exactly as Lady Blanche said it would. A hurried, hearty breakfast, and the gentlemen were off; a long pleasant day, in which we sketched, and drove to see a romantic glen some miles distant; a late late

dinner, and a conversation, in which the words "bagged" and "brace" were always occurring; tea and coffee, and the day was done.

The day following, so far as we were concerned, was somewhat different. While the gentlemen were preparing to depart, Captain Moreton still sat lingering at the breakfast table; and when Colonel M'Leod exclaimed, "Come, Moreton, what are you dreaming about? are you not going to shoot to-day?" he replied dreamily, and playing with his spoon as he spoke, "No, I think not; the ladies are going to sketch, I believe, and there is a magnificent view from the home park that I have promised to shew Lady Blanche many a month ago. If they will permit me, I shall point it out to-day," and he glanced toward me as he spoke.

"We should be sorry to interfere with cousin Gerald's pleasure, should we not, Miss Raye?" said Lady Blanche; "and we know well that ladies have a bad chance when partridges are in the way," she added, looking archly at her cousin.

"Partridges *versus* ladies," cried Colonel M'Leod. "Well, I lay ten to one on the ladies! What do you say, Kinkeld?"

"What is it all about?" said the Earl. "Oh yes, I see; Gerald prefers the society of the ladies to the partridges. Most natural, I should say. At eight-and-twenty I would have done the same," and he bowed to us as he spoke.

"Just as I expected," said the colonel. "I can

assure you, Lady Blanche, considering the havoc your gallant cousin made yesterday, the partridges ought to be very much obliged to you."

So Captain Moreton stayed, and there was no help for it but to allow him to go sketching with us. He made himself, as usual, very agreeable; but sometimes I fancied there was a little restraint, and that Lady Blanche would have been better pleased had we been alone.

In the afternoon we rode out. I was a good horse-woman, and enjoyed nothing half so much as a good ride. We were well mounted, and scoured the country till the westering sun warned us to return.

We had little more than time to dress for dinner, yet Lady Blanche stood lingering in my room in her habit, playing with the whip, which she still carried, talking over the incidents of the ride, and praising my horsemanship, at which she seemed surprised. At last, flinging herself down in a chair, and slowly removing her plumed hat, she said, "I wish Gerald had gone a-shooting to-day. I wish—I wish—I don't know what I wish. Yes I do, though. I wish he were good," and, burying her head in her hands, she burst into a fit of uncontrollable weeping.

What could I do, or think, or say? Nothing—absolutely nothing. Were I to speak, being ignorant of the circumstances, I might only make matters worse. So, after simply saying, "Dear,

dearest Lady Blanche," I hung over her in silence. By and by the paroxysm passed, and looking up, she said, with a little of her usual composure, "I'm afraid I have frightened you, Miss Raye—Cecile. You will let me call you Cecile, won't you? I shall explain this to-morrow. I can trust you, my own friend. But I must go and dress now. Forget what you have seen, and not a word to Aunty, please," and picking up her hat, she left the room.

When we met again she had so completely recovered her quiet lady-like composure, that I could scarcely believe she was the same person I had seen so lately weeping and sobbing in my room. I felt pre-occupied and *distrait* all evening, trying to conjecture the cause of her emotion; but conjectures and guesses were vain. I knew it related in some way or other to Captain Moreton, and that was all.

Next day he went a-shooting, and relieved us of his presence; I don't know if I should say *us*, but let that pass. We worked quietly in the early part of the day. Lady Blanche was quieter and, I thought, paler than usual. I longed to put her in mind of her promise, but feared to renew such an unpleasant subject, when our eyes happened to meet, and I suppose she read in mine what my mind was filled with, for she said, "Yes, I've not forgotten; in the afternoon you shall know all."

At luncheon Lady Charlotte said, "I've ordered *the carriage* at half-past two. I'm going to call

on Lady Gray, will you young ladies care for going, or have you any plans for the afternoon?"

"No, I think not," replied Lady Blanche; "we had a long ride yesterday; and I did not intend going out, but perhaps Miss Raye—." And she looked at me without finishing her sentence.

"If Lady Charlotte does not particularly wish it," I said, "I should prefer remaining with you."

"Wish it? oh no, child; I'm fortunate in being very independent of society; with my book and my dog I can set the world at defiance. So, Fanny," she continued, speaking to a fearfully over-fed English terrier, "you shall go out to-day; the air is balmy, and the sun shines; perhaps the drive will do your asthma good—poor old dog!" And changing the subject with alarming rapidity from her favourite dog to her favourite author, she added, "And really the insight that dear delightful Bulwer gives into the ways of the world is most surprising. Have you read 'Ernest Maltravers,' Miss Raye?"

I blushed as I answered, "Yes."

"Quite right, quite right," resumed her ladyship; "a young girl should be fortified against the ways of the world; there's my niece now, she has always so much to do, stockings and things of that kind to knit, that I can't get her to take a respectable novel in her hand. I fear she will find herself sadly deficient in the literature of her country. A man like Bulwer too!"

Lady Blanche smiled; but there was a light in her eye that I thought exceedingly beautiful.

"Please your ladyship, the carriage is at the door."

"Dear me, I've forgotten." She was leaving the room, when she turned back: "I'll be down in a few minutes, perhaps; Blanche, dear, you'll carry out Fanny, the servant is so rough, I'm afraid he'll hurt her."

"Yes, Aunty." And with some difficulty she lifted the pudding of a thing, wrapped its rug round it, and carried it into the hall; while I, wishing to make myself useful, lifted three volumes which lay beside Lady Charlotte's chair, and carried them there also.

In a short time her Ladyship reappeared, with a handsome ermine cape over her arm, and on seeing Lady Blanche she exclaimed, "Dear me, you surely have not been standing with 'Fan' all this time in such a draught! She will catch her death! Give her to me. Poor thing, see how she shivers; I'm sure, Blanche, you might have had more sense." She wrapped the ermine round the black fat terrier, deposited it, with her own hands, in the carriage, got in herself, took the books from my hand with a graceful acknowledgment, and the remark that she knew I sympathised with her tastes, and felt assured that we possessed much in common. And the carriage bowled off. "Now then," *I said to* myself; and turning round into the hall

once more met the eyes of Lady Blanche. "Yes, I know what you are thinking of, *cara mia*. Will you come up stairs with me?" And she slowly led the way.

Turning from the landing into a short curtained corridor, she drew a bright key from her pocket, and opening a door, we entered a room which I had not been in before. It was a large and stately bed-chamber, with a faint odour of dying perfume. Looking as it did to the east, it had, in the afternoon of this autumn day, when nature was a-glow without, a cold, grey look, which, to my sensitive imagination, gave it a funereal air. Nor was this dispelled by its style of furniture, which consisted of a large four-posted bed, heavily draped with crimson silk, a four-leaved dark mahogany wardrobe, dressing table to correspond, two devotional chairs, a small table on which lay a large Bible, and a picture, veiled, over the fireplace.

After a few minutes' silence, Lady Blanche said, in a low subdued tone, "This was my mamma's room, dear mamma! I never enter it, but I think I see her, as I saw her last, lying pale and motionless there." And she pointed to the bed, and then quickly turned aside her head. In a minute she resumed, "And yet, I like to come here; when I am in any trouble, it just seems as if I could tell *her* all about it; and after spending some time here I always feel relieved and comforted."

I listened in silence; I fancied I could under-

stand something of her feeling; but I was wrong; there may, there must, be sympathy; but I do not believe any two beings in the world can fully enter into, or understand, each other's sentiments or sorrows.

"That is mamma," she said, approaching the picture, and gently drawing aside the veil, and displaying to my view the face of a lovely woman, with that style of complexion of which I was so fond—black hair, not the common shade, but black almost purple in its depths, with soft languishing blue eyes.

After gazing at the picture for some time in silence, Lady Blanche said, "You like that face, I need not ask."

"Yes, it is most beautiful; not like you, however."

"No, I am like papa's family, cousin Gerald is more like mamma. Mamma, mamma," she repeated, "Oh, that those lips had language!" And then in a low, almost wailing cry, she added, "Oh, what would I give just for one word, just to hear her say once more, *My daughter!* But no, no, no, it cannot be; never in this world can whisper more fall from these lips. Cecile, did you ever lose any one you loved?"

I felt my cheek whitening, "Yes," I answered, "but it's long, long ago." My voice thickened—"I lost a baby brother."

"And you have not forgotten?"

I clasped my hands: "Oh no, I never can forget!"

"Then you know what I have suffered—you can pity, you can sympathise! But I must cover this," she said, softly replacing the veil, or else I will be able to think—to talk of nothing else. You had better sit down, however; what I promised to tell you will occupy some time."

I sat down, and Lady Blanche began; "Cecile, when mamma died, now nearly five years ago, I had but one wish, and that was, that I might meet her again in heaven; that wish is still paramount in my breast. Nor was I in ignorance of the way to accomplish this wish. Dear mamma had taught me about the Saviour, *whom to know is everlasting life;* she taught me also to love His blessed book, and many a passage taught to me by her dear lips returns now with tenfold force to my heart. This being the case, you will easily understand my anxiety that one whom I have liked" (I ought to say loved, the colour came to her cheek) "from childhood, should hold the same faith, should love the same Saviour; but alas, I fear that cousin Gerald—"

"You don't mean Captain Moreton?" I interrupted hastily, while my heart gave a great throb.

"Yes, who else could I mean? Have you forgotten his name?" she asked, with somewhat of her usual playfulness. "But I forgot, it is just

possible that you don't know—have not heard of our engagement; an engagement, indeed, that may have been said to have taken place in our childhood; for, since ever I remember, it seems to have been an understood thing by his parents and mine, and by ourselves too," she added, colouring all over, "that when I was old enough we should be married. But of course you knew nothing of this?"

It was well I had not Lady Charlotte with her "knowledge of the world" to deal with. And Lady Blanche appeared quite satisfied when I said, that I had heard the engagement spoken of; but not knowing her at all, and scarcely anything of Captain Moreton, it had escaped my memory. I then begged pardon for my interruption, and she resumed, "I was saying that I feared Gerald not only had no knowledge of these things, but that he laughed them to scorn."

I ventured to suggest that possibly she might be mistaken, but she replied, "Oh no, I'm not mistaken; I wish I were, for Gerald is very dear to me, but I have too good reason for speaking as I do. On one or two occasions I have attempted to introduce serious subjects, and have always found that he laughed, not only at me, which I could have borne, but at *them*. Of course it was done in the prettiest, most playful way; he called me 'his little saint,' and said, 'if all saints were as fair, he *would* worship at their shrines from early dawn to

evening grey,' but under this I had no difficulty, alas, in recognising his real feelings. And now I must either make up my mind to marry a man with no religion, or refuse one whom I have loved, whom I do love." Lady Blanche covered her eyes with her hand, but she shed no tear.

We sat in silence for a few minutes, when I said, "I don't think Captain Moreton is a bad man, and perhaps, even if he is, your example after your marriage may—"

"No, no, no," she interrupted hurriedly, "*I must not do evil that good may come*, and besides, the question must be decided now; for papa received a letter from Lord Belraven a few days ago urging him to have a day fixed for the marriage, on the plea that he feared Gerald was getting wild, and he wished to have him *settled*. Now is not this too confirmatory of my fears? But you do not know all: the breaking off from this marriage will vex papa very much. He has always regarded it as *une chose decidée*, and has felt his mind quite at ease in regard to my future provision. For you must know," she continued smiling, "I am not rich, at least not for an earl's daughter; this estate is strictly entailed, and goes with the title to my father's only brother, Captain Innes Drummond."

Captain Innes Drummond! There was a ring about the name that sounded familiar to me; but I said nothing, and Lady Blanche went on, "You can understand, therefore, something of the em-

barrassment of my situation. I would rather say nothing to dear papa on the subject; he is the last in the world to force me into a marriage distasteful to me. But for this one element, however, you know, a marriage with Gerald would be very far from distasteful. Besides, I sometimes fear that papa, even if I were to mention my objection, might think I was straining matters too far; and aunty, were I to say anything of it to her, would laugh right out and say I knew nothing of the world, that all young men must sow their wild oats, that the wildest young men often make the best husbands, and similar stereotyped sophisms which bear falsehood on their very front." The poor girl spoke slowly and sadly, and it was easy seeing how great the struggle was between her desire to do right, and her desire to fulfil a long standing engagement, in which her heart was but too deeply interested.

"If mamma had only been alive," she resumed, after a few minutes' silence, "what a counsellor—what a companion she would have been! O Cecile, be thankful that you have still a mother!"

My mother! The thought, the *possibility* of losing *her* had never once occurred to my mind; and now that it did so, I exclaimed almost wildly, "Were my mother to die it would kill me!"

Lady Blanche rose and laid her hand gently on my shoulder, "Don't say so, Cecile, you know not —no one knows what can be borne till the time

comes. *I* am younger than you, and I have lost *mine*." Her beautiful eyes swam in tears.

I tried to comfort her, but words, poor, paltry words, how vain they are!

She sat down again, and laying her hand on the large Bible, said smiling through her tears, "One comfort still remains to me,—I have my mother's counsellor."

And in a voice husky with emotion I added, "And your mother's God!"

She gave me a grateful look. But the scene was becoming too painful for both of us. And Lady Blanche, pointing to a large morrocco-bound silver-clasped volume which lay beside the Bible, made an effort to change the subject by saying, "That is mamma's album; you are fond of pencil drawings; I think you will like those."

I opened the volume. Lady Blanche was right; the very first drawing arrested my attention. It was a "head" done in that equisite style of soft delicate pencil-drawing, of which we occasionally see specimens in the portfolios of our grandmothers, when ladies had time and taste to spend a few hours daily in the pursuit of this most refining and graceful accomplishment. The album was nearly full, most of the drawings being likenesses of friends and relations of the late countess; and I was examining them with pleasure, Lady Blanche telling me the names of the subjects that interested me most, when, on turning a page, I

suddenly exclaimed, "And this! who's this?" while my breath came and went convulsively.

"What is it?" asked Lady Blanche quietly, without noticing my emotion.

"It is—," I bent over the volume closely to regain my calmness, "it is the head of a boy about ten years of age, with waving curly hair, and a face full of arch mirth." I did not add, "and every line of which is dearly familiar to me."

"Oh! that," said Lady Blanche, "is my cousin Frank, son of the Captain Innes Drummond I mentioned some time ago; a dear roguish fellow he was then, and a very pleasant playmate; although in a fit of folly and romance he gave his father and all of us a great deal of anxiety by running away and joining the merchant service as a common sailor.

My lips parted, but they emitted no sound.

"But indeed," she resumed, "I suspect folly and romance run in his blood. His father, a few years before Frank's flight, married his servant girl, captivated with her pretty face; but, poor man, he paid dearly for his folly, first in the disappearance of his only son, and then in the misery he endured from her coarse, bad temper and dissipated habits. She died a year or two ago, much to the relief of all connected with her."

"And," I ventured to inquire, with my head still buried over the album, "has his father—have you *ever* received any intelligence of—him—of Frank?"

"Oh yes," she replied, "but he is still a sailor in the merchant service. He likes the profession, he likes his master, and with his father's consent he continues in a profession he so strangely adopted."

I was not sorry when at this moment the gong sounded for dressing. I had had enough of revelations for one afternoon!

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Charity Ball.

AFTER my return home, nothing materially affecting the course of this story occurred till towards the end of October. The weeks glided past, full of that quiet happiness which is so pleasant to feel, so difficult to describe. A new bond seemed to be formed between me and Aggie; gentle, loveable, amiable as she had been before, she was now doubly so. Hitherto, in her singular reticence, her presence was scarcely felt, now she was like a perpetual sunbeam in the house—a sunbeam, too, which cast no shadow. There was no way, in her sweet unselfishness, in which she did not seek to minister unto, and even to anticipate, the want of others.

"How very well Aggie looks," whispered mamma to me one day; "I sometimes fear she is too beautiful."

I followed mamma's eyes to where Aggie was standing, and I certainly concurred in her opinion. No one could have differed from it; for if transparent cheek, flushed with vermilion, combined with delicacy of feature, soft brown hair, and hazel eyes, irradiate with dewy brightness, form almost a beau ideal of beauty, Aggie possessed it. But why should mamma fear? I had no fear; on the contrary, I was happy and proud: happy because I knew she was happy; proud for my own sake—proud, very proud, for the sake of another. Ah, little do they think who Frank is—little know what a proud destiny awaits her; and my diamonds—how fortunate are such a suitable present for such a bride! All these ideas flashed through my mind before I answered mamma, and said, "Oh no, mamma, she is beautiful, not too beautiful; she is happy, that's all." Our eyes met, and I read in my mother's that she knew everything. In a few minutes Aggie left the room, and mamma, drawing me close to her, and kissing me, said, "Cecile, poor girl, you have been sorely tried, but you've acted a good and noble part; you've been more than a sister to little Aggie; but I trust, nay, am sure, you will be rewarded. Am I wrong in supposing that you are rewarded already?"

"You are not, mamma. I was rewarded, first, when I felt the consciousness that I had done right; next, when Aggie got Frank's letter; and now—now—when you—," words failed; I flung my-

self on my mother's bosom, and wept—but not tears of sorrow.

By and by I asked, "Does papa know about Aggie and Frank?"

"Yes, my child."

"What did he say? was he pleased?"

"Oh yes; he likes Frank, you know. He said that Frank had the best right to her, as, but for him, she would have been drowned years ago. The only thing he said approaching to an objection was, that he must know who and what Frank's father was, before he gave him his little daughter."

"A most natural stipulation," I replied. Then I smiled, and thought there would not be much difficulty about that; but I said nothing. I should keep Frank's secret, so strangely discovered, till Frank himself should think fit to reveal it. I must confess, however, that since I made the discovery referred to, a misgiving had occasionally crossed my mind lest Captain Innes Drummond, with his aristocratic blood flowing in his veins, might object to his son's marriage with the daughter of a plebeian merchant, however respectable. Then I endeavoured to re-assure myself, by remembering that he himself had married his servant, and that he could not, with consistency, object to his son pleasing himself, and marrying one who, save in birth, was in every respect his equal. Still, I was not re-assured—human nature is so inconsistent!

Since my return from Kinkeld House, I had, as

far as politeness permitted, studiously avoided Mrs Brodie. I could not help, in my own mind, contrasting her with Lady Blanche, and the contrast was by no means favourable to my former friend. Lady Blanche always wished to do what was right, without thinking of appearances; Mrs Brodie cared not how much wrong she did, provided she could save appearances. The influence Lady Blanche produced on my impulsive nature was beneficial, that produced by Mrs Brodie was baneful. But it is unnecessary to pursue the contrast further; let it suffice to say that I had another, and, if possible, more powerful reason, for endeavouring to repudiate the friendship of the latter. To be intimate with her, was to be intimate, very intimate, with Captain Moreton; to walk out with her, was to ramble with him. I could not explain the reason of this, but it was the fact; and since I had learned his engagement to my friend, and another secret besides, which my own heart told me, I felt it only to be common fairness and common honour that I should avoid his fascinating society.

Towards the end of October, my father brought home with him two tickets for a ball that was to be held in aid of the public charities of the town. We were rather surprised at this, as he was very far from approving of public balls; but he quickly explained by saying, "Two of the members of the committee came urging me to take tickets,; and when I told them that I did not see the use of

balls, but as they were so hard up I would give them the two guineas, and they could make a present o' the tickets to folk that had nothing else to do but dance awa' their time; they thanked me, took the money, and went away, leaving the tickets behind them. So I put them in my pocket, and brought them wi' me; and I think, now they are here, there would be no great harm, just once in a way, for you two lassies to go an' see what it's like. They tell me it'll be a bonny sight."

The temptation was irresistible. I trembled all over with delight. Often had I longed to go to a ball; but never had I mustered courage to ask permission. Now it had come unasked, what a chance! Mamma might not approve; but now that papa had given his consent, she at least would not condemn. I went dancing and capering about the house; waltzed with my little brothers; consulted with Jenny about my dress; and was cross, absolutely cross at Aggie, because she remained firm in her determination "not to go." This determination of hers, however, materially smoothed my way. None of mamma's friends being ball-going, a difficulty arose about a chaperone, and my only resource was to present Aggie's ticket to Mrs Brodie, and get her to chaperone me. This she was but too happy to do, and arrangements were made accordingly. For myself, I held in abeyance all my reasons for avoiding Mrs Brodie's influence; everything must

give way to this wonderfull ball; and as my father said, "It was just once in a way!"

The night came at last; I went to my room to prepare; there lay my lovely dress ready to put on. And very lovely I thought it was; I had never had a ball dress before; and as I gazed upon the rich pink glacé silk, the gossamer tulle, and the dew-bespangled roses, my heart filled with rapture at its beauty. In a little I stood before the mirror scarcely recognising myself, I must confess; my hair fresh from the hands of a Parisian hair-dresser; my cheeks glowing, and my eyes radiant with excitement.

"You are beautiful," exclaimed Aggie; "you'll be the belle, Cecile; but you must not get vain. Oh, but you've forgotten, where are your diamonds?"

"No, Aggie, I won't wear them to-night; indeed I don't know that I ever will. I have a purpose for them."

"A purpose for your diamonds, Cecile? what a strange girl you are! What are you going to do with them?"

"You shall know in good time, dearest, darling Aggie," I answered, kissing her; "I must go now and see what mamma thinks of my dress."

A few minutes more, and the ring of the bell announced the carriage; according to arrangement, it had gone first for Mrs Brodie, so I descended at once, and kept neither her nor it waiting.

We had scarcely time to enter into conversation, when we found ourselves at the County Hall, where the ball was to be held.

To describe a ball room would be gratuitous; and to describe the sensation which this, the appearance of my first ball room, produced on me would be impossible. Lights, flowers, music, stately ladies; dresses fairer, richer, costlier far than mine; flashing jewels, brighter eyes; I was nobody, and speedily forgot myself in the midst of the brilliant scene by which I was surrounded. I was in a delightful dream; but I was suddenly wakened, suddenly reminded that I was *one* of this brilliant company.

We had arrived early, much too early to be fashionable; and when I was startled from my reverie by the words, "Miss Raye! how delightful! You will honour me by dancing the next quadrille with me?" spoken by a voice which I knew but too well, the room had rapidly filled; and I found that more eyes than I cared for were fixed on me and my companion. The majority of those present consisted of the aristocracy of the county, who generally were expected, and certainly nobly fulfilled such expectations, to patronise the public institutions of the county town, and a select few who considered themselves *par excellence* the "*haut ton*" of the said town. This select few, this *crême-de-la-crême* of Dunearn, was composed of [illegible]wyers, officers retired on half-pay, and a few

medical men of some standing. Most of these were men poor in means, but rich in children. And though their daughters sometimes had scarcely a decent dress to walk out in, still they contrived to give dinner-parties to all the marriageable young men of the town; dinners which it would require a Dickens or a Thackeray to describe; though I suppose they were quite *comme il faut*, as a professional cook and a man in plain clothes were always engaged for the occasion! The guests not belonging to the town must have been a little amused on going to a round of these dinner parties, to find dinner always announced by the same fat, sleek, respectable looking Jacob Jones; and must have been tempted to think that either he was ubiquitous, or that Dunearn was rich in Jacob Joneses.

The young lady opposite me in the set of quadrilles to which I was conducted by Captain Moreton, belonged to this Jacob Jones, patronising, dinner-giving class. I knew her well; as a girl I had attended the same school, sat on the same form, rubbed shoulders with her in the same class. *Mais n' importe*, our intimacy ceased when we left school, and in the course of a year afterwards she looked the other way when we happened to meet in the street. It was only what might have been expected. Was she not one of the *haut ton* of Dunearn, and I but a merchant's daughter! But my hour of triumph was now come. Captain Moreton was by far the handsomest man in the

room; and, what was far more important, the only son of a wealthy peer of the realm. Had I been less sensitively, less delicately organised, I might have enjoyed it; but as it was, ah! The dance began, and every time the figure led me into proximity with my acquaintance of other days, she gave unmistakeable signs of annoyance; she elevated her pug nose; tried to curl the upper lip of her awkward ungainly mouth; waved her pocket-handkerchief instead of giving her hand; and at last consummated her rudeness by refusing mine when offered! My colour went and came during this series of petty insults; but the last completely unhinged me, and I with difficulty found my way back to my partner's side amid a suppressed titter from a few more of the *haut ton* of Dunearn. Captain Moreton's eye flashed, his proud lip curled; but he bent upon me a look of such exquisite tenderness that I never forgot it. Conducting me back to my seat he said, in a tone low and full of suppressed emotion, "Would to heaven I had the right to lead you thus as my wife; those wretched vulgar creatures would be the first to cringe before you!" He bent towards me as he spoke.

I scarcely understood the meaning of his words; but I trembled all over, while the colour, which rudeness had brought to my face, suddenly left it, for I felt my cheek becoming deadly cold. Mrs Brodie was not in the place where I had left her,

nevertheless I sank down on my seat; to walk longer was a physical impossibility. Captain Moreton lingered beside me. The strain of a polka fell on our ears. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "before I dreamed of you being here I promised to dance the first polka with Lady Monroe, she will think I have forgotten her; but what's to be done? I cannot leave you here alone!"

I implored him to go—assured him that a few minutes' solitude would compose me more than anything else, and said, "I had no doubt Mrs Brodie would come back immediately."

"Can I believe you, Miss Raye? but, no; I cannot, I will not leave you. Lady Monroe may find another partner. I declare there she is; looking for me—absolutely looking for me. Confound Mrs Brodie!"

"Go; do go at once," I said, as I saw a pretty dark-eyed woman approaching us.

"On one condition then, that you dance the next with me; I will look after the behaviour of the town-bred *ladies*." He emphasised the word. I could not forbear smiling.

"That's right," he said; "I shall be back in a few minutes." Another look of tenderness, and he was laughing and apologising to Lady Monroe, whom I overheard asking, "What singularly pretty girl that was he was flirting with now?"

Mrs Brodie did not return. During our absence she had also engaged herself for this polka. Sitting

alone as I did, I fancied my seat somewhat conspicuous. A pillar stood at a little distance from me. I rose up, quietly glided in behind, and leaning my head against it, saw without being seen. For a time I watched the motions of the dancers; then, by a mental freak, the scene suddenly changed, and I was carried back to a small darkened chamber with a little lifeless tenant—and the picture of Charlie, my baby-brother, with clay-cold little face and pretty little hands crossed on his breast, as I had seen him long long ago, arose fresh and vivid to my eyes. I pressed my head against the pillar, my heart swelled; the glittering dancers still wheeled past; the lively strains of the polka still filled my ears; but I was far, far away—a child again, watching, watching in that darkened chamber. And death threw his cold cruel shadow all around me; the gloom of his presence overpowered me; the sheen of glittering silk, the brilliant lights disappeared from my view; but still, still the music filled my ears, and still it seemed, now, ever, and again to be set to words—holy, blessed, beautiful words,—which in this connection it would seem almost like blasphemy to repeat.

"Have I found you, 'little Bo-peep'?" cried a merry voice in my ear. I heard, but had not power to answer. "But heavens, what is this?" continued the same voice. And I felt some one *trying* to unclasp my hands which I had wound

round the pillar. "Cold! stiff! dead! What a confounded fool I was to leave her! Mrs Brodie, we must have Miss Raye as quickly as possible to another room. Confound those wretches! I'll be hanged if I touch their flat champagne and sour claret again; I'll teach them a lesson! Cecile, Miss Raye—dearest Miss Raye, won't you look at me—speak to me?"

Slowly I was returning from my state of semi-trance, slowly recovering the use of my senses; but the transition was too sudden, the contrast too great; merry music broke upon my ear; lights flashed in my eyes; dancers flitted past. It was too much—too much. I tightened my grasp upon the pillar to prevent myself from falling, and wailed out, "Take me home, take me home!"

"She is better, thank heaven! Miss Raye, dearest, take my arm; lean on me."

I took hold of the offered arm almost mechanically, and accompanied by Mrs Brodie, went to an ante-room. Captain Moreton conducted me to a sofa, procured me a glass of wine, and then stood watching me with eyes full of the exquisite tenderness I had noticed before. I felt revived, but still I said nothing, could say nothing but, "Take me home, pray take me home!"

"In a few minutes, Miss Raye," said Captain Moreton; but it is necessary, absolutely necessary that you should rest a little. Is it not so, Mrs Brodie?"

"Captain Moreton is quite right, Cecile; you require rest now; but you are better already. Who knows you may be able for another dance yet."

"Oh, not to-night, not to-night," I murmured; "I only wish to get home," and once more I felt my cheek whitening.

Captain Moreton's quick eye perceived it, for he immediately said, "I shall go now and order a carriage. Mrs Brodie, I need not request you not to leave Miss Raye till my return?"

No sooner was he gone, than Mrs Brodie commenced; "Cecile, I would not have given you credit for this. I never saw a prettier piece of acting in my life. You've hooked Captain Moreton, and no mistake. I'll lay a bet he'll propose before the end of the week."

I felt wholly unfit for her raillery, and, while tears welled down my cheeks, implored her to desist. But it was no use; she kept up the same style of lively badinage till Captain Moreton returned. What wild infatuation ever compelled me to make this woman my friend?

It was such a relief to be delivered from Mrs Brodie, that I hailed his return with a smile of welcome, which, I fear, he misconstrued, for his face brightened, and, in a tone full of tenderness, he said, "I have got a carriage; shall you go now?"

"Oh, thank you! yes." I rose from the sofa,

but staggered in the attempt to walk. Captain Moreton drew my arm within his. At this moment I happened to glance toward Mrs Brodie. A great yellow flame was burning in her eyes, and an expression of supercilious contempt hanging about her mouth. I almost imagined I heard her saying, "How interesting!" She, however, with great apparent kindness, drew the opera cloak which was hanging round my shoulders close to my throat, and we lingered a few minutes longer.

"Don't you think we had better go at once, dear Miss Raye?" said Captain Moreton, as he felt the tremblings I was still unable to repress.

"Certainly—yes," and I looked to Mrs Brodie.

"Well, good-bye, Cecile, dear; I hope you'll get safe home."

"Are you not going to accompany her?" asked Captain Moreton in a tone of surprise.

"Well, no; I don't think it's necessary; besides, I should not like to disappoint my partners. I'm engaged for four or five dances to-night yet. You won't mind me not coming, Cecile, dear?"

"I said, Oh no." Captain Moreton gave her a look that said more than words; then turning from her, he drew my arm still closer to his side, and we proceeded to the carriage.

Here I was struck with a new proof of his attentive forethought. On the seat of the carriage lay a handsome furred mantle, which he wrapped me carefully in, saying he had borrowed it from Lady

Monroe for the purpose; then shutting the door, he said, "I shall see you home, Miss Raye," and, without waiting my answer, he sprang up on the box beside the driver.

In a few minutes he was at the carriage door again. Handing me carefully out, he led me up the steps to the hall door; in a tender whisper hoped I was better; said he would do himself the honour of calling to-morrow; raised my hand respectfully to his lips, and departed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A Flattering Offer Declined.

NEXT day I rose late, pale, weary, worn. I had spent a sleepless, restless night, varied only by brief moments of repose, in which all the events of the preceding evening were reproduced with kaleidoscopic confusion. Aggie had brought me a cup of tea, and when I appeared in the parlour, I found my mother there before me.

"Well, Cecile," she said, after the usual salutations had passed; "you don't seem to have got over your fatigue. Did you enjoy the ball?"

"Pretty well, that is to say, it was nice to look at; but I don't think I would care about going to another."

My mother smiled. "I am glad it has produced such a result; I was only afraid it would have had quite an opposite effect on my too susceptible Cecile. Did you dance much?"

"Not much, mamma; I—I—" how I longed to tell her all; but as yet I dared not, my feelings were still too keen.

She looked at me anxiously, and then she asked, "Whom did you dance with?"

"With Captain Moreton," I replied, evading her eye, "and by the way, I fear he will call to-day; I did'nt ask him," I added hurriedly, "he said he would come; I would very much rather he would not. Do you think I could refuse to see him?"

"I don't see how you could; he is not like a stranger casually introduced to you last night. Besides, he is a relation of the Earl of Kinkeld, and if I remember right, lived for a week under the same roof with you. It would be absolute rudeness to refuse to see him. Cecile, how could you think of such a thing?"

"I thought *you* did not like officers; and papa —you know what papa says." Then I coloured, for I knew this was not the whole truth.

"Well, unfortunately, both your father and I have had too good reason for our feelings on that head; but it is just possible we may have carried our feeling into prejudice. Be that as it may, by a strange and most unexpected train of circumstances you have formed Captain Moreton's acquaintance, and till he prove himself unworthy of your friendship he must be treated with common *civility*."

"O, mamma! mamma!" I mentally exclaimed, "what at this moment would I give for your veto on Captain Moreton's visit? But everything seems against me."

I took up a piece of work and applied myself to it assiduously. In a little mamma asked, "Was Captain Moreton the only one you danced with last night?"

"Yes—no!" Then I got up and said, "Mamma, I've a good deal to tell you; I don't feel able for it now; will you kindly excuse me; some other day, perhaps, you will listen while I tell you all." And I got up and left the room; while my mother cast one of those yearning wistful glances towards me with which I had been so familiar in childhood.

In the course of the day Captain Moreton called. Just at that moment I happened to be in the drawing-room alone. He approached, shook hands, and inquired after my health with the utmost tenderness, remarking at the same time, that I was still looking pale.

"Yes, I know it," I said, with a faint attempt at a smile; balls don't agree with me. I don't think I shall ever go to another."

"Make no rash promises, Miss Raye, I beg; I confess you were singularly unfortunate in your *début*, but I trust you shall yet grace many a ball-room."

I shook my head: "Another night like the last would kill me."

Captain Moreton made no reply, but his eyes filled with the expression of tenderness which was now so familiar to me. For a moment we were both silent. He looked at me, I at the floor. The silence was beginning to be embarrassing; but however strong Captain Moreton's feelings might be, he was too well-bred, too polished, to allow such an awkwardness to continue. "Miss Raye," he said at last, "I uttered words last night which you possibly may have heard; possibly having heard, you may have treated as having no meaning—no weight. But whatever construction you may have put on them, if you thought of them at all, I assure you I never was more in earnest in my life." (I bent my head still nearer the ground. *He* must not see the varying emotions of my heart.) "I came here, Miss Raye, just now with one purpose—one determination: need I tell you what it is? does your heart not whisper it? or have I deceived—flattered myself, in supposing that I was not indifferent to you? O Miss Raye" (the words now came fast, and full of suppressed emotion), "must I tell you of all the love which for months has been pent up in my heart, and which for months I have been struggling to repress? Why repress? you may ask. Because duty, honour, called me to fulfil an engagement entered into, when I was little more than a boy, with one nobly born, and in every respect worthy—more than worthy—to be my bride." I clasped the hands

which were lying on my lap, but I did not interrupt him, and Captain Moreton continued. "It is scarcely necessary to enter into the particulars of this engagement, further than to say that it is now at an end, and I am at liberty to offer heart and hand together to one whom to see is to admire, to know is to love. Miss Raye, will you accept them? will you be my wife?"

I tightened the fingers of my clasped hands, and, with eyes still bent on the ground, simply said, "And poor Lady Blanche, Captain Moreton?"

I did not move my head, but still I knew intuitively that he started; and the tone of his voice was perceptibly changed as he asked, "What, pray, do you know of Lady Blanche?"

"That she loves you! that at this moment, possibly, her heart is breaking!"

"The latter part of your sentence I don't believe, Miss Raye; Lady Blanche has not a heart capable of breaking. The first part may be true; it is possible that she loves me in her own cold-blooded way!" Captain Moreton spoke with bitterness.

I looked up in defence of my friend; "Lady Blanche cold-blooded! oh no!"

Our eyes met. I coloured all over. "*You* are not cold-blooded, at all events," he said; "and I did not come here to discuss the merits or demerits of my worthy cousin, Lady Blanche Drummond." The bitterness of his tone was gone, but sarcastic

pride was still there. It melted away, however, and his voice became full of its own exquisite tenderness again, as he continued, "No, Miss Raye; I came here to place my fortune, my heart, my happiness at your feet; to ask you, in other words, to be my wife?" Then he was silent, evidently waiting for my answer. And I, poor miserable I! what was I to say? With a heart torn with contending emotions—with a traitor, that I dreaded to look at, harbouring in my breast—with a mental consciousness and pride of the flattering offer (I was not without ambition) I had now received—and with the determination, moreover, to reject it—what answer could I make? Any one who may have been placed in somewhat similar circumstances, with inclination, affection, *love*, pulling one way, with duty, principle, pointing another, may form some idea of my difficulty; no one else can. The silence continued, the throbbing of my heart increased. Its pulsations became louder and louder, till, in my agony, I almost fancied they were heard amid the stillness of the room. Terrified lest they should betray me, I commenced in set phrase: "Captain Moreton, I am not insensible of the honour you have done me—" He broke in impetuously, vehemently, "For heaven's sake, Miss Raye, don't speak to me in that way! Tell me you hate me, order me from your sight at once, if you do not love me. Do anything, say anything, rather than tell me of the *honour* I've

done you! The greatest honour that the world can bestow, would I willingly give for one glance of your eyes at this moment, and you know it; and yet, with consummate coquetry, you keep them fixed on the floor. O Miss Raye, why will you treat me thus? why will you talk to me in studied phrase, when a smile, a blush, a sigh, a whisper, would be sufficient answer? Why should you turn a deaf ear to the promptings of your heart, when it tells you it loves me? Start not, dearest Miss Raye; concealment on your part is vain. I have studied you well, and carefully; I have weighed my chances of happiness as a man weighs the chances of his life (what is life without happiness?), and I knew, in coming here to-day, that whatever your answer might be, whatever, under the influence of female coyness or womanly caprice, you might say, that your heart was mine, irrevocably mine!"

I could bear this no longer. With flushed cheek and flashing eye I turned at bay. I started to my feet. "Captain Moreton," I exclaimed, "you carry this too far! Your words may be true; they may be mere surmises. With my heart and its emotions I alone have to do; for them I alone am accountable. You presume too far, even in supposing that because my heart is yours I will accept your offer to become your wife, proud, flattering though such an offer may be. My heart may break, but I will not betray friendship and principle."

"I do not quite understand you, Miss Raye," said Captain Moreton, "it seems to me you carry chivalrous views too far; perhaps you are not aware that it was Lady Blanche herself, and not I, who refused to fulfil the engagement."

"Yes, I supposed as much," I replied, "from what she told me of her sentiments, and of the grounds on which she feared she would have to decline it."

"She told you these, Miss Raye? I did not think she was such a confounded fool!"

"Captain Moreton," I said, with a feeling of composed dignity at which I was astonished, "while I can make every allowance for the excited state of your feelings, I cannot possibly permit you to speak of Lady Blanche in that way in my hearing."

His proud lip curled, and an expression flitted across his face which I had never seen there before as he said, "You are at perfect liberty, Miss Raye, to do battle for Lady Blanche, but I don't intend to enter the lists as her champion. I have now to ask you just one question more, Miss Raye, if you'll permit me, and after that I shall put an end to an interview which has already been sufficiently painful. Is it your opinion that in accepting the offer I made you there would be a betrayal of friendship and duty? or were they words spoken merely in the excitement of the moment?"

I had resumed my old attitude, and sat with

hands tightly crossed on my lap and eyes fixed on the ground. I did not move when Captain Moreton addressed me, but simply said, slowly and deliberately, "They were words spoken in the excitement of the moment, but they are words, nevertheless, which breathe my true sentiments."

"Your ideas about friendship I can understand, Miss Raye, and I doubt not in a few days you will think them as Quixotic as I do now; but your idea of duty I cannot. May I ask how you would betray principle? Yes, that was the word. O Miss Raye, how could you betray principle by wedding the man who loves you, who places his rank, his fortune at your feet?"

The question which I dreaded had come at last. And oh! how to answer it without giving him pain, without appearing to cherish a spirit of self-righteousness! Trembling all over, I said, speaking falteringly and very low, "I would be betraying principle, I think, in marrying a man who makes no profession of Christianity. God knows," I continued, speaking faster, "I am a poor miserable sinner, but He also knows that my highest ambition, my earnest prayer, is to love Him and to do His commandments; and how can I do this and—and break—break one of his express commands." I burst into tears; my composure was completely gone; I flung myself on the couch and wept convulsively.

Captain Moreton looked silently on. At last he

said, "Miss Raye, I might have been angry with you had I loved you less; as it is, I pity you, poor little fanatical fool. Heaven knows I would willingly sacrifice all I possess for the privilege of making you happy—for the privilege of drawing you to my breast and kissing away your tears. But it may not be. Destiny I may and shall curse, you I cannot! Farewell, Miss Raye!" He touched my head lightly with his lips; and ere I had time to raise it from the pillows in which I had buried it he left the room, passed through the lobby, and out at the hall door. I heard it shut behind him, and I felt I was alone!

CHAPTER XXV.

The Musical Soiree.

AUTUMN winds blew loud and dreary over brown moorland and bare meadow; they whistled through the bare and half-stripped trees; they drove before them in angry gusts the sere and withered leaves. With strange pleasure I sat listening to them, or stood at the window watching their pranks. They suited the state of my mind, found an echo in my heart. The short summer of my life seemed gone; its bright blossoms withered; its fair fruits fallen beneath untimely frosts; and what now remained but a long winter, with its gusts of sorrow, its storms of desolating passion?

It was now the middle of November. A fortnight had elapsed since my interview with Captain Moreton, during which I had never gone out of doors, never done anything indeed but wandered, or rather dawdled about, weary and listless, unfit

for any exertion either of body or mind. I was a stupid, foolish creature, and I told myself so. But that did not mend matters; in truth, it rather made them worse. The knowledge of one's folly is not a pleasant bosom friend. In vain I argued with myself, that having done what my conscience told me was right, I ought to be happy. Alas! I learned then that duty is a hard taskmaster; and that in this world at least, happiness is not always the result of doing right.

Not that I regretted refusing Captain Moreton; I said to myself, "that I would do the same thing again were it in my power" (which was not likely); but the sacrifice cost me more than I reckoned. All unconsciously had love for him grown up in my heart; all unconsciously had this love, like a strong tendrilled plant, forced its way into its every nook and cranny, and wound itself, so to speak, around my life itself. And now it had to be rooted up, bit by bit, fibre by fibre; and the tendrils of this strong love, which almost supported my life, must be torn down, ruthlessly torn down one by one! Ah, it was a slow, cruel process! And it must be done; not in obedience to a loving sisterly instinct, not in the hopes of being rewarded by seeing the rose come to the cheek, and the light to the eye, of a cherished friend, but at the command of a stern, yet vaguely undefined and skeleton form, called duty!

I told no one of Captain Moreton's offer, and my

refusal; no, it was a sacred secret to me. Had I told my mother, much unforeseen misery might have been prevented, but fate ordered it otherwise.

Mrs Brodie had called only once since the ball, and whether the change lay in me or in her, I cannot say, but we met more as casual acquaintances than the intimate friends we used to be. On the 1st of December, however, she called again, bringing some exquisite coloured crayons to shew me, and kindly offering me the use of them to copy.

I was grateful for the offer, and accepted it thankfully. If anything could divert my mind from its dull wretchedness, this copying would; and, with somewhat of my old eagerness, I proposed to go out with her and purchase the necessary materials, in order that I might set about it at once.

Mrs Brodie seemed somewhat surprised. I had never since my return from Kinkeld House offered to go out with her of my own accord. But she little knew the gnawing misery from which I was anxious to escape.

This first day of December (how well I remember the dates of that period!) was just what a first of December should be—bright, sharp, frosty; and as I stepped out into the bracing air, I felt just as an invalid would do if plunged suddenly into a bath of cold water. The effect on my naturally sound physique and elastic spirits was magical. For the moment I forgot all about my misery.

about Captain Moreton, and, strange to say, Mrs Brodie never once reminded me of him, never once alluded to him. In truth, she seemed somewhat disconcerted at my high spirits, and looked occasionally in my face with an expression of wonder in her yellow grey eyes.

The printseller's shop was reached, the materials purchased, and I was stepping out, with glowing cheeks, and a lighter heart than I had had for many a day, when, among a group of gentlemen, I recognised Captain Moreton. Peace, foolish heart! Our eyes met. He bowed, lifting his hat with the utmost deference, and my companion and I passed on. My glowing cheeks were crimson now, my heart beating wildly. This meeting was so unexpected. My parting with Captain Moreton partook so much of a final measure, of a farewell, that it never occurred to me to remember that he was still in the same town, and might be seen any day, and at almost any hour of the day, by simply walking down one or two of the principal streets. He was looking ill—wretched. I longed to hear Mrs Brodie speak of him, and made sure she would; but, with what seemed to me a strange perversity, she did not. She was a clever woman; was it possible that she knew, or guessed at what had taken place, and took this mode of shewing her anger at my want of confidence in her? or was it only a whim of her peculiar nature? Who could tell?

Every day after this first of December, on one plea or another, Mrs Brodie came to our house. She watched the progress of my crayon drawing, and admired it amazingly. When the weather was fine, she asked me to walk out with her, which I invariably did, and invariably enjoyed, never once again meeting Captain Moreton. On one occasion, and one only, Mrs Brodie mentioned his name. It happened thus: she drew off her gloves to shade a bit of my drawing, just to try her hand, she said, and as she was not so skilful in handling chalks as the keys of a piano, I trembled for my beautiful piece, and watched her carefully. I soon saw that her object was not to draw, but in reality to display a diamond ring of apparently great value, for it flashed and shone with a thousand lights as she moved her hand about.

"What a magnificent ring!" I exclaimed, after examining it for some time; "where did you pick it up?"

"I did not pick it up at all; I had it given me."

"A very handsome present too," I said, looking at her inquiringly.

"Not so handsome as your set, Cecile; but then, you see, I had not the luck to save an Earl's daughter. It's not amiss, however," she continued, glancing at it proudly. "Can you guess who gave it?"

I shook my head. I could think of no one but her husband; and, however willing he might be,

I knew the state of his finances too well to suppose for a moment that he was the donor. "I cannot guess," I said.

"Can't you? What would you think of your old flame—Captain Moreton?"

There was to my ear something vulgarly offensive in the expression "old flame;" nevertheless I allowed it to pass, and simply said, "Indeed!"

"Yes, I see you are surprised, possibly shocked at me, a married woman, receiving a gift at his hands; but it was as a married woman I received it."

"Indeed!" I had nothing else to say.

"He did it in the handsomest manner—presented it to me through my husband. Do you remember the commission he gave him to execute? Yes, I see you do," she continued, as I coloured. "Well, the bust, when finished, pleased Captain Moreton so well, that not only did he pay him more than was promised, but begged him to accept this ring" (holding up the finger on which it was, and playing with it as she spoke) "for me, as a pledge of his satisfaction with the work executed. I can tell you my husband is very proud of it."

"And so he may," I replied; "I can scarcely conceive anything more flattering."

"Let me see," she said, almost interrupting me; "didn't you give Mr Brodie two or three sittings for that bust; he had some absurd notion that there was a likeness—."

"Yes, yes," I said, breaking in hastily, as I had no particular pleasure in being reminded of these circumstances; "I sat three times to him."

"*Three times!* I wonder if Captain Moreton is aware of that fact! I think you ought to have a diamond ring too."

"Mrs Brodie!" I said indignantly, "how can you speak in that way? It was, you know well, to please your husband, and not Captain Moreton, that I gave those sittings."

"But you see it has pleased him too." Then looking at me archly, she continued, "I have not the slightest doubt in the world, Cecile, that these sittings have given a cast to the bust; and that it is the likeness of *you*, and not his mother, that has given Captain Moreton such intense satisfaction."

I sighed. It was just possible there might be some truth in her statement; if so, I could not help feeling that it was very unfortunate. I remained silent however. I was most desirous that the subject should be changed, and anything in the shape of protestation or justification would, I knew, only provoke Mrs Brodie to continue it. For hours I could listen to her while she talked about books, paintings, music, or the world in general; on such subjects it would have been difficult to have found a more agreeable, a more fascinating companion; but when she approached the feelings, the sentiments of the heart, and of my heart in

particular, she became, in my opinion, the most odious woman the world contained.

Christmas with its festive season was now approaching, and every one was preparing to celebrate it in the usual manner. Parties and balls were the order of the day. My mother was arranging for one of her biennial quiet gatherings, and Mrs Brodie, determined on not being behind, resolved on giving a kind of musical soirée. The idea was delightful, and we set about practising our parts in earnest. I and Mrs Brodie were to take the principal share in the concert, assisted by some gentleman friends of Mr Brodie's. We had several pleasant practisings both at our house and at Mrs Brodie's, in anticipation of the event; and between these and the time spent in my crayon drawing the days sped swiftly.

Much mental misery, I speak from experience, might be avoided were young ladies of the middle classes taught to apply themselves more to such pursuits. The higher gift of genius cannot, of course, be bestowed; but in nine cases out of ten the taste for, and the love of the beautiful exists, requiring only to be drawn out and cultivated in order to prove a never-failing source of gratification and pleasure to its possessor.

The evening of Tuesday the 23d of December was fixed for the musical soirée. I had a pretty, simple, blue tarlatan dress made for the occasion. It was trimmed with black velvet and lace, and had

a pleasing picturesque effect. I remember well standing before the glass that evening, and thinking I looked well; my long golden hair looked pretty with the blue, and the black trimmings relieved the whiteness of my skin. Don't pass the verdict of vanity on me hastily, however, although I happened on this and a few other occasions to be pleased with myself; it was not always so, indeed the reverse was the rule. Aggie was invited along with me, but Mrs Brodie gave the invitation only as a piece of civility, knowing well it would not be accepted. Indeed, my little Aggie was as happy as she could be with her own sunshiny thoughts, and much preferred staying at home and guarding them as a miser does his hoard.

I went therefore alone. The Brodies had made quite an effort for their entertainment, and were rewarded by its success. Their rooms were crammed. There were few, however, of whom I had much personal acquaintance; but they were all, Mr Brodie said, "of the right sort," and evidently determined to please and be pleased. Had I not been absorbed with the music, I might have been amused with the airs of a young dancing master, with the eccentric long hair and sallow cheeks of a newly-fledged author of romances, with the snobbishness of two or three aspiring clerks, and with the absurd toadyism of a Mrs Grimmond and daughter, who, having exalted Mrs Brodie to the highest niche in their temple of honour,

worshipped accordingly. But tea and cake went the rounds and were removed, and the great business of the evening commenced. I soon forgot everything, forgot myself even in the music. The parts were well sustained, and the performers well selected. We passed from grave to gay, from instrumental to vocal, from part singing to solos; the dancing-master played on the cornopean, the writer of romances sung a comic song, the three clerks applauded. Mr Brodie had selected well, "they were of the right sort!"

Another part piece was being performed, and I was standing with my face to the piano, when I suddenly heard a voice join in the chorus, which I recognised at once, and knew but too well. I turned round and found, as I expected, Captain Moreton. How did he come here? I could answer the question but in one way: by invitation —special invitation; and for some reason or other Mrs Brodie had taken care not to tell me. By the time the piece was finished, I had determined on the course I ought to pursue, which was to treat him simply as an old friend, and to ignore, if possible, the remembrance of anything else. In accordance with this resolution, I turned round and held out my hand. He took it cordially, and with the consummate tact which characterised him, understood at once the *role* he was expected to play. We talked together for some time on the most commonplace subjects; while speaking of

the weather, he told me, to my surprise, "that snow had begun to fall," and I began to think of my arrangements for going home. When I came, the evening was bright and frosty, and I had told Jenny to come for me about ten. But if snow fell rapidly, such an arrangement would be far from pleasant, Waterloo Terrace being at least half an hour's walk from Mr Brodie's residence.

I freed myself, however, from anxiety, by trusting that either my father or mother would order a cab, and by remembering, that as it wanted two hours of the appointed time, the snow might pass away as suddenly as it had come. With a light heart, then, for I was quite re-assured by the composure of Captain Moreton's manner, and by the control which I had gained over my own feelings, I sat down at the piano to play, as had been arranged, the accompaniment to a duet which Mr Brodie and his wife were to sing. Captain Moreton hung over the piano, turning the music for me. How well I remember it—song—scene—everything! How happy I was, forgetful of the past, heedless of the future!

By and by supper was announced. Mr Brodie led in Mrs Grimmond; and Captain Moreton at his request gavé his arm to me. As we were following close behind, Mrs Grimmond said, in her habitual loud vulgar tone, "You don't mean to say that she's Thomas Raye's daughter? Dear me, I mind o 'm when he sell't tatties and [redacted]

meal, an' she looks as if she had been born an' bred a countess!" Mr Brodie replied in a voice that was not audible, and I fancied that I heard a "hush." The next moment, however, her voice was raised again, "Lord Belraven! my word that would be a match! where's my daughter Jemima?" And turning right round, she found herself in the awkward dilemma of seeing the two people of whom she had been speaking. Her broad red face became, if possible, redder as she said, "Oh, sir, I beg pardon; oh, miss, I beg pardon! but I'm lookin' for Jemima."

"Yes, yes," replied my companion, in a reassuring tone of voice, "we quite understand."

Mr Brodie turned round also as Mrs Grimmond spoke, with a very decided expression of mortification on his countenance. At that moment, I fear, he questioned whether all his guests were of the right sort!

I was glad when supper was over. It had not been by any means so pleasant to me as the first part of the evening. Exactly opposite to us sat the dancing master and Jemima, who did nothing but eat and stare at us; while on my other side sat the writer of romances, who seized every opportunity of comparing my eyes to stars, my cheeks to roses, and my throat to—, well, never mind, it came to an end at last, as all things do.

We returned to the drawing-room, and hung *about* in scattered groups for a short time, ere the

music began again. Mrs Brodie shewed Captain Moreton some prints. I was looking at another portfolio, and while doing so heard Captain Moreton ask her in a low tone, "If snow still fell?"

"O, yes," she replied, "fast and quick."

"How fortunate," he said; "I told you everything depended on the weather."

I was trying to understand what this meant; when she suddenly looked in my direction, and said, "I fear, Cecile, you must stay here all night; it snows so fast."

I shook my head, "That is impossible. I daresay they will send for me."

"I have no doubt they will," said Captain Moreton.

"I hope they will," said Mrs Brodie.

I pulled out my watch: "Dear me, I had no idea it was so late," I said; "it's past ten already."

"Then we must to our work," said Mrs Brodie; "there are three pieces on the programme yet in which we cannot possibly dispense with your assistance, Cecile."

"I shall be only too happy," I replied; "but remember I must go immediately I'm sent for."

"Most certainly," she answered, exchanging looks at the same time with Captain Moreton; "it would not do to keep horses waiting in such a night."

"Horses!" I cried; "what are you thinking of? I don't expect to be honoured with more than one."

Mrs Brodie laughed, and threw another glance at Captain Moreton. What did this by-play mean?

The music recommenced and continued without interruption, save by the few minutes occupied in conversation and applause between the pieces, for upwards of an hour; then I distinctly heard the roll of carriage wheels, which stopped under the window. I turned to Mrs Brodie; she smiled, and said, "It's all right." I glanced at Captain Moreton, and was struck with his deadly paleness. In a few minutes the servant entered the room with the announcement, "That a carriage waited for Miss Raye." I smiled at the fine name given to a cab, for I felt sure the open phaeton would not be sent on such a night; took leave of Mrs Brodie and her guests, who evidently had no intention of moving for some time yet; put my arm in Mr Brodie's, who conducted me to the conveyance, and, followed by Captain Moreton, stepped out into the street. I started back, however, saying, "There must be some mistake; this has not been sent for me!" For, indeed, the servant was right. It was no cab, but a handsome, well-appointed carriage, with two fine horses, and harness which the glitter of the street lamps shewed to be silver. While I still hesitated, the man, who stood holding the door, approached, and, lifting his hat, respectfully said, "Miss Raye, I presume?" I bowed. "Then it's all right," he continued; "your father ordered this carriage for you. At the moment he called,"

the man added by way of explanation, "our cabs were all out, and he told us to take whatever we had. So master ordered us to bring this here carriage; for he said, what's very true, that Mr Raye's money is just as good as any man's, and that there is not a man in Dunearn for whom he entertains a greater respect; so, Miss, it's all right."

I could hesitate no longer; I stepped into the carriage quite re-assured. Mr Brodie shook hands, and Captain Moreton approached the window: "Will you permit me to see you home, Miss Raye?"

"On such a night as this, Captain Moreton!" I replied; "certainly not; it would be unkindness, cruelty!"

"Be it as you wish, Miss Raye." And, smiling, he held out his hand. I said, "Good-bye." The man shut and fastened the carriage door. The last thing I saw was Captain Moreton standing on the pavement, his head bared under the fast falling snow, waiting till the carriage drove off.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Night Drive.

I FLUNG myself back with a sigh of comfort on the luxuriously padded and cushioned seat, and gave myself up to a kind of dreamy repose, which all around me tended to encourage. The carriage was full of a pleasant warmth, proceeding from a large pan of warm water, which, with amazing forethought, had been placed in it; while a sweet faint odour filled the interior, and held my senses captive. I was too much tired to reason concerning these luxuries, and simply gave myself up to their enjoyment. The snow fell still outside the closed windows; the street lamps glimmered like spectres as we passed; the music in which I had taken part still filled my ears; the tones of *one* voice thrilled through my heart. In a few minutes the drowsy-falling snow-flakes, the glimmering street lamps, the gentle motion, the warmth, the

perfume, but, above all, fatigue, caused by my exertions during the evening, produced their effect. I shut my eyes with languid pleasure, and ere I well knew, was fast asleep.

. . . . . .

How long I slept I knew not; it may have been minutes—may have been hours; but I wakened suddenly with a start, like one who dreams, and with the impression on my mind that the carriage had stopped at our door. It was not so, however. The gentle motion still continued. I was at a loss to explain the cause. Even supposing I had slept only a few minutes, the time would have been sufficient to have conveyed me to Waterloo Terrace. I was in perfect darkness, yet I drew out my watch, and waited for the next lamp. In vain; the darkness continued; the glimmer of the lamps had ceased. Wherever I was, it was evident the carriage was beyond the boundaries of the city. There must be some mistake. I pulled the check-string violently—with no result. In despair, I opened the glass face of my watch, and tried to *feel* the hands. After one or two attempts, I found, as near as I could guess, that it was half-past twelve. Half-past twelve! more than an hour since I had left Mrs Brodie's, and still, still we were going on at a pace which seemed increasing! In an agony, I rushed to the window. It had ceased to be transparent. I applied my handkerchief to the inside of the glass, but produced no effect; the

snow from the outside was evidently the darkening cause. I tried to open the door. It was locked. I pulled the check-string repeatedly—furiously. It broke in my hand. What was to be done? Nothing—absolutely nothing! But I could not sit quietly down; I shrieked, I screamed, till I was unable, from hoarseness, to hear my own voice. I drove my arm against the window, in hopes of breaking the glass, but it was plate, strong and good, and resisted my futile attempts. What was to be done? Resign myself to my fate? To what fate? Where was I? where was I being taken? who was taking me? My mind gave no answer to these questions. Romantic, imaginative as I was, the real state of the case never once crossed my brain, nor was I afraid. I lived in the nineteenth century—in the age of civilisation—had no enemies, and nothing about me in the shape of jewels or money to make me worth the robbing. The only solution, therefore, I could give the mystery was, that the driver possibly had been under the influence of drink, and had fallen asleep, or gone out of his way in the darkness of the night.

Provoking, then, as my situation was, I had the consolation of believing it to be the result of a mistake; a mistake awkward enough, it is true, but still a mistake, which, sooner or later, must be discovered, and consequently rectified. Judge of my bewildered astonishment, then, when, through *the* window, from which, dark as it was, I had never

once removed my eyes, I began to notice the reflection of lights, which seemed to move about; and when, in a few minutes more, I found they proceeded from men with lanterns, waiting outside a small inn with relays of fresh horses! Yes, *four* fresh horses. The carriage had left Dunearn with two, and now we were to have four, strong and good. In the light of the lanterns I saw them distinctly champing their bits, curvetting, playful. This looked like design. I could no longer flatter myself that I was the victim of an innocent mistake. The carriage was almost close to the inn now, and I held my breath, and tried to still my throbbing heart, that I might be able to take advantage of the first opportunity which might occur to declare my situation, or escape from my novel prison.

But the expected opportunity never occurred. With breathless, silent rapidity the change of horses was made; the men in charge of the business were either too much engrossed with their duty, or too sleepy and stupid to think of anything else, for they never approached the closed window, my signs were unnoticed, my cries unheard! There was not a moment lost. Cold though the night was, the driver did not even descend to stretch his legs or rub his hands, or have his "nip" of brandy to keep out the cold; but the instant the words "All right" were spoken, the crack of the postilion's whip was heard, and once more

the carriage drove off. Helpless and hopeless, for my last ray of hope was gone, I sunk back in it, and, with the stolidness of dull despair, shut my eyes and tried to sleep. To sleep! how vain the attempt! Images of misery filled my brain which till now I had not thought of: my mother sitting up for the first hour wondering, watching; then pacing the room, weeping, wringing her hands; Aggie endeavouring with tender endearment to soothe, to comfort with words that brought no comfort to herself; my father, in his strong-minded agony setting off to Mrs Brodie's, and finding I had left that hours ago, calling in the aid of the police, and with characteristic energy getting at once upon the traces of his missing daughter! When I thought of him, hope for an instant returned, but when I remembered that my captors, whoever they were, had at least two hours of a start, that their plans were well laid, their arrangements evidently well made, I felt how hopeless my hope was, and once more sunk back in despairing apathy. But to describe the fears, the wretchedness of this most miserable night would be impossible. Slowly passed the hours; another change of horses conducted in the same rapid pantomimic manner; another long stage and the grey light of the winter morning began to break in the east, the red sun began to rise above what seemed the smoky fogs of a great city; the smoothness of the roads was changed for the rattle of the streets,

and while thousands were awaking to begin the bustle and the turmoil of another day, the carriage suddenly stopped in front of a large hotel in one of the principal streets of the town. There was nothing like mystery in this, and I comforted myself. Presently waiters appeared on the steps. One approached and exchanged a few words with some one on the box; then he came up to the carriage door, unlocked it, and held out his arm to assist me to alight. Anxious as I was, however, to be delivered from the prison of the past night, I hesitated while I rapidly thought over what was best to be done. Should I make a scene here, tell the waiter of my abduction, and demand to be placed under the care of the authorities till I could communicate with my friends; or should I get quietly into the hotel, ask to see the landlord, and commit myself to his care? Either way seemed safe and easy, but the quieter plan commended itself. I glanced again to the stately hotel; there was no mistaking its thoroughly respectable appearance; I glanced along the broad pavement, many people were now astir and were passing and repassing in both directions; I breathed a silent prayer for guidance, and, stepping out of the carriage, followed the man into the hotel, thinking meanwhile what object or aim my captors could have in bringing me so far only to place me in such a favourable position for escape.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Ordeal.

"SHEW Mrs Moreton to the rooms prepared for her, at once," said a voice behind me to a chambermaid who had made her appearance, while I stood lingering and irresolute, wishing, yet fearing, to ask for the landlord.

Turning round, I confronted the speaker, and said, in a tone of indignant passion, "Pray, Captain Moreton, do not add falsehood to your other sins; you know I am not your wife;" and then I added in a tone meant for his ear alone, "Unprincipled as I feared you were, I never thought you capable of the villany you have practised in taking me away from my friends. Oh! you will send me home now?"

His face was deadly white, but it wore a determined air; and a curl of his haughty upper lip was his only answer to my appeal. I looked

towards the waiters and the chambermaid to see if my statement had produced any effect on them. But they were only exchanging very quiet and very meaning smiles, and one of the waiters placed his hand very significantly on his forehead, at which the others laughed more than ever. I was at a loss to understand the meaning of this strange behaviour, but turning to the chambermaid, I begged her to go and ask her master to come to me at once, as I had something of the utmost importance to communicate. At this they all laughed, and she neither answered nor moved in obedience to my request. I felt my face becoming crimson; I could not stand there to be a laughing-stock to servants. I cast an imploring look at Captain Moreton, who now stood near me. He answered it by saying, "When you are ready, *Mrs Moreton*, the servant will shew you your rooms."

But to go with her I had positively made up my mind not to do. I regretted now bitterly that I had entered the hotel at all; but as I had done so, I determined as the next best thing, to keep as near the entrance door as possible, and endeavour on the arrival of the first stranger to escape. This determination, however, was speedily rendered useless, for Captain Moreton addressing himself to the head waiter said, "However unwilling I am to have recourse to extreme measures, yet in the present state of Mrs Moreton's mind, I

fear I must give orders to have her conveyed to her room by force, if persuasion will produce no effect." Then turning to me he added, "It's no use opposing my wishes; one alternative you have, either to follow the chambermaid quietly to your room, or to be carried thither by the servants."

"I will not go," I replied quietly and firmly.

"Then you shall be carried."

"I will not be carried. O, Captain Moreton," I continued, "think—think what you are doing before you cause violent hands to be laid on me; think what an account you must give for this at last!"

"Mrs Moreton," he replied, "you may spare your eloquence; really it grieves me to see my wife lower herself so in the eyes of menials. Will you proceed at once to your room?"

"Not one step, Captain Moreton, I have already told you. I throw on you all the responsibility—all the odium of this most disgraceful action."

He gave a signal to the servants to carry me up stairs; but he evidently was not prepared for this opposition, for he trembled visibly.

As for myself, I seemed endued with supernatural strength. I struggled, I screamed, and resisted for a time the combined efforts of four men. The noise I made at last brought the landlord into the hall, exclaiming, "What's all this row about?" But he got no answer save from his wife, who had followed him closely, and who

said, "It's only the poor mad lady we were told to prepare for, my dear; she does not want to go up stairs, that's all."

Her husband gave a grumph; "Confound her, no; who ever heard of a mad woman doing anything she was wanted to do. Confound her yells, we'll have the police. What made the Captain bring her here? Morningside 's the place for her." And the landlord with his wife disappeared.

It is needless to say that my determined attempts at resistance were soon overpowered, and I was partly dragged, partly carried, to a room on the first floor, while heads peêped out at many of the doors as I was pushed along, and faces full of horror or terror stared at me from every corner. After being somewhat unceremoniously thrust into the room, I heard the door double-locked behind me, and was left to my own meditations. These were of the most miserable—most mortifying description; mortifying, as I could not help feeling that, by walking into the hotel, I had walked into a prison far more secure than that of the previous night; miserable—miserable beyond description, when I thought of those from whom I had been torn, and of the one, lately so much beloved, who had committed the deed. What could have induced him? what mistaken impression of my character could he have formed? Could he dream of compelling me to be his wife, as his addressing me by that title seemed to imply? But vain

these and a thousand similar questions which passed through my mind, unanswered and unanswerable. To divert it, if possible, from such thoughts, I got up from the couch where, in my agony, I had thrown myself, and began pacing up and down the length of the room. It was large, handsome, and magnificently furnished; but the air of splendour which the crimson silk-covered furniture and hangings gave it, was completely destroyed by the stout iron bars which were placed outside the large windows. I went close up to them, and, with an undefined feeling of curiosity, began to examine them. The first thing I noticed was, that they were evidently newly placed there, for the stone of the window-sill shewed fresh marks of the chisel, and the leading was bright, as if run in but yesterday. "*My room has been prepared for me*," I said to myself bitterly; and yet I could not see the necessity of all this care. The windows looked to the back of the hotel, and though the room was on the first floor to the front, yet from the area basement it stood three storeys from the ground, so that escape through them was next to impossible. Peering through them, I caught a glimpse, mid the winter fog, of the lion-crested Arthur's Seat, and thus ascertained that I was in Edinburgh, in the metropolis of Scotland, beyond doubt. From the style of buildings I passed in the morning, and from the appearance of the hotel I was now in, I had guessed as much; but now

there was no longer room for conjecture; Arthur's Seat put an end to that. With the certainty of knowing exactly where I was, a ray of hope rose in my heart. "It was impossible," I told myself, "that within so short a distance of my own home, I should not be traced and found out," or that, in a large town, some means of putting myself in communication with my friends "would not fail to arise." Poor foolish thing; little did I know that, for purposes of villany, a large town was of all places the best, the most suitable, the most private! Ignorant of this, however, I took heart of grace from knowing where I was, and commenced my inspection of the apartment which was my prison for the time. A door on one side arrested my attention; I opened it, and entered another room, a bed-chamber, furnished sumptuously, elegantly, and with every requisite for a lady of rank and station. In other circumstances, I would have admired its lace-draped toilet table, its prettily decorated mirror, its bottles, its china, and satin counterpane; but now I only glanced at its strongly-barred window, and sighed. Yes, the rooms had been prepared for me in more senses than one; the bolts had even been wrenched from the inside of the locks!

When I was placed in the room in the morning, a handsome breakfast equipage stood on the table, with covers for *two*, and the aroma of the coffee diffused a tempting fragrance; but I heeded it not,

Now, towards noon, a waiter entered, and with silent rapidity cleared away the breakfast things, while another placed on the table, in their stead, wine, fruit, and cake. These were two of the men who had helped to bring me up stairs, and I entertained too much self-respect to address to them a single word. I had glanced, it is true, towards the door as they entered, and had seen it carefully locked in the inside while they remained in the room, and had heard it as carefully locked behind them when they withdrew. This, however, gave me little anxiety, for I knew that even if I succeeded in leaving this apartment, I would speedily be discovered, and consigned to it with a fresh accession of ignominy. No; my great hope now, strange to say, lay in Captain Moreton himself, and I began to long even for his coming! Meanwhile, to beguile those wretched hours, and to do something which might lead to my deliverance, I bethought myself of writing on innumerable scraps of paper a statement of my case, and having them ready to scatter in all directions on the first opportunity. I looked round the room, but it was as I expected, or rather feared; no paper, no ink, no pen! But I would not give up my idea, it seemed too good for that; and having read or heard of a prisoner who had written upon a handkerchief with his blood, I determined to follow his example. I drew my fine cambric one from my pocket, and tore it into pieces, as much as possible of one size

and shape; then, with the pin of my brooch, I pricked my arm till the blood began to flow, and immediately began writing, or rather dotting, on the cambric the following words:—"*Cecile Raye has been carried away from Dunearn by Captain Moreton, and is now kept prisoner by him in one of the large hotels of Edinburgh. Oh let her father know this, and he will reward you!*" I had written this painfully, and at a greater expenditure of time and strength than I had anticipated, when suddenly all became dark before me. I rose hurriedly from where I was sitting, and attempted to go to the other end of the table, where the wine was standing, with the intention of swallowing some, for I knew well that I had need of all my presence of mind, and all my energy. The attempt, however, was too much for a body exhausted by fatigue, want of food, and mental excitement; they had done their work, and I, their victim, fell to the ground, and remained there in a state of happy unconsciousness!

By and by, however, I opened my eyes, and returned to a state of consciousness and misery. Making another attempt, I succeeded in reaching the table, pouring out, and swallowing a glassful of wine; then my eye falling on my punctured arm, and seeing it all bloody, and blood still trickling from the wound which I had made unnecessarily deep, I seized one of the shreds of cambric, bound it tightly round it, and fastened

the ends with the assistance of my teeth. The written shred was then carefully folded up and placed in my bosom, the others put in my pocket. This business being thus disposed of, with wonderful calmness and composure I knelt down at the couch and poured out my soul in prayer to Him who holds the hearts of all men in His hand; asking grace and guidance from Him for Jesus' sake; praying specially for my poor mother, and for him so lately too well loved, that he might see the error of his ways and be brought to Jesus ere it was too late. I rose from my knees refreshed and comforted, and sat down on the couch, with a sweet assurance that all would be well, to await the coming, but no longer dreaded, interview.

I had forgotten to wind up my watch, but, judging from the closing in of the short day, it must have been nearly four o'clock, when I heard the sound of a well-known footstep coming along the corridor. The key was put in the door and the lock turned carefully, and quietly, as if to prevent me from hearing it, and Captain Moreton stood before me! Not the proud, imperious Captain Moreton of the morning, however, but Captain Moreton—pale, haggard, wretched; his black hair dishevelled, and his whole bearing denoting the deepest distress. Much as I had suffered at his hand, my heart was touched. He approached the couch, from which I had risen on his entrance, and

in low tones said, "Cecile,— Miss Raye! can you forgive me?"

"Not," I said, "till you have made reparation."

"Reparation! you know how willing I am to make the most honourable reparation in my power, to make you my wife."

I shook my head, and said mournfully, "Every prospect of such reparation is gone and past for ever; the ill-judged step you have taken, Captain Moreton, is perhaps after all the best for me; it has stamped out the last smouldering embers of my foolish love for you."

"Then you will not forgive me, Miss Raye?"

"Not, if your idea of forgiveness consists in returning your love—in becoming your wife." I felt my face glowing as I spoke, but my calmness did not forsake me.

"Miss Raye," he whispered hoarsely, "do not drive me to desperation; you little know how much you are in my power."

"I know I am so entirely. Witness those grated windows, those wrenched off bolts! such wooing may suit some women, it does not suit me," I answered proudly.

He looked at me with something of admiration; "Yes, you are in my power, and even now you do not know to what extent. At the present moment I have in my possession a document, signed by witnesses, declaring your insanity, and I have only got to bring a doctor to see you, and you

have only to say 'I am not the wife of Captain Moreton,' and I procure his affidavit to lodge you in Morningside to-morrow morning!"

"That may be true, Captain Moreton," I replied, "and I have no doubt is true, for your plans are well laid, and gold unfortunately is too often the instrument of evil rather than of good; besides, your statement only confirms the idea forced upon me this morning, that your policy was to represent me as mad, though, I confess, I had no notion you would carry it so far as to think of putting me in a lunatic asylum."

"And now that you do know?" he asked eagerly in a husky voice.

"It makes no difference," I rejoined, "in the strength of God I shall do my duty, which, unfortunately for you, becomes more clear from each succeeding statement you make."

"You defy me then?" he asked, approaching nearer to the corner of the couch on which I had been obliged to reseat myself.

"No," I replied, springing to my feet and placing the table between us, "but I do not fear you. Without power from above you cannot injure one hair of my head; and I do not doubt that this fearful ordeal to which I am being subjected will redound to God's glory, and that I will come out of it purged from many follies. And you too—O Captain Moreton! who knows but that it may prove a blessing to you also!"

He shook his head sadly, and remained some minutes silent. When he spoke at last he was evidently deeply moved: "You are right, Miss Raye, you have nothing to fear from me. God alone knows what this wretched business has already cost me. But won't you resume your seat (seeing I leant heavily on the table), won't you trust to my honour as a gentleman (would, for your sake, I could say a Christian)."

"Yes," I answered, "I will trust you." And going round, I sat down in my old seat in the corner of the couch.

"That is right," he said, while his eyes looked his gratitude. "I have much to tell you."

I looked at him with a feeling of surprise, and he resumed: "Yes, Miss Raye, much to tell you—much unfortunately to deplore. You spoke truly when you characterised this as an ill-judged step. But I was ill-advised, misled; I do not offer this as an excuse for my conduct; as I now see it, nothing can excuse it, but simply as an explanation. Writhing as I did from your refusal, I confided my sorrow, my secret, to your friend Mrs Brodie. She laughed at me, told me you were a coquette, assured me that you loved me; this I did not require to be told (pardon me speaking plainly, Miss Raye; now is no time for false delicacy)—asserted that you only wished to be asked again, and then suddenly remembered that your parents had a dislike to officers, and possibly

it was from a fear of offending them that you had refused my hand. I clutched to this idea as a drowning man to a straw; it seemed to my mind the true reason of your conduct, and I threw out the remark more in joke than anything else, that I would carry you off some night, and then you would be at liberty to choose for yourself. Mrs Brodie was delighted with the idea; she talked constantly about it; offered to assist me by every means in her power; brought me constant intelligence that you—you whom I loved so dearly—were pining on my account; wrought me up to the necessary pitch; and then took the principal part of the arrangements into her own hands. You know the rest, and without blaming Mrs Brodie more than she deserves, I may just add that none but a very clever and very wicked woman could have acted and arranged as she has done. How came you, as unlike her as light to darkness, to make such a woman your friend?"

I buried my head in my hands, and then I replied, "I have often asked myself the same question, Captain Moreton, and have never been able satisfactorily to answer it; I know I was foolish and wrong, and am now paying the penalty, for 'The companion of fools shall be destroyed.'"

He looked at me in silence for a minute, with something of his old tenderness, and then said, "Now Miss Raye, what reparation must I make?"

"Restore me without a moment's delay to my

wretched parents, to my home," I answered, without an instant's hesitation.

He looked at me earnestly, but I did not give the slightest sign of irresolution; on the contrary, I felt, and daresay I looked, quite determined.

At last he said, solemnly, "If this is your determination, Miss Raye, it shall be carried out; but God forgive me, in that case I have done you a grievous, an irreparable wrong. Oh, think again, before you allow your fair fame to be destroyed by the breath of scandal! Innocent as you are, pure and innocent as I know you to be, you will not be able to protect yourself from its foul breath. At this moment all that Dunearn knows, all it will ever care to know, is that you left it under my protection, and *with your own free will.*" I started. "Yes," he continued, "for this statement you are indebted to your *friend* Mrs Brodie. 'While quite sure,' she said, 'that you would never seek to return but as my wife, she nevertheless thought it very desirable that things should be placed in such a train that it would be impossible for you to do so without forfeiting for ever your good name!'"

"Oh wisely wicked woman!" I exclaimed in agony, "and my parents—?"

"They had a message sent them to the same effect."

"Oh misery of miseries! but they will never believe me guilty!" I cried.

"I cannot tell; such things have happened before," he replied.

I buried my face in my hands; I had never looked at things in this light.

"Once more," Captain Moreton resumed, in a low sad voice, "I offer you the only reparation in my power—I offer to make you my wife. O Miss Raye, cast not away for a myth the advantages I offer—wealth, rank, station, and honourable love! Say Yes, and I take you back to-morrow and sue forgiveness for my rash conduct from your parents on my bended knees; say but Yes, and I place you as peerless among the peeresses of the land!"

For an instant I hesitated, and remained silent with my head buried in my hands. For an instant the Tempter stood before me; for an instant he held his scales before my eyes; in the one—riches, station, honour; in the other—a blasted name, shame, disgrace! for an instant, thanks to God 'twas but an instant, he almost triumphed; then, bright as lightning flash, the words appeared before my eyes, and I uttered them aloud: "*What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul.*" *This* was my answer to Captain Moreton. He understood it and bowed. Then after a few moments of solemn silence he said, in a thick husky voice, "Your wishes shall be respected, Miss Raye; you shall return to your friends to-morrow." I murmured my thanks.

"And you will forgive me," he asked, "for the cruel wrong I've done?"

"I will, most heartily, most sincerely."

"And you will think of me sometimes when I am far away?"

"I will pray for you," I said solemnly.

"Yes, do," he broke in hurriedly; "my mother prayed for me—who knows—who knows—" emotion choked his voice. In a little he resumed, "And now, Miss Raye, all that remains for me is to bid you farewell; I shall exchange into a regiment in India; in all likelihood you will never see nor hear of me again." He held out his hand as he spoke, I gave him mine, he raised it to his lips. "Farewell," he said again, "a thousand farewells, and should we never meet in this world, we may, who knows, meet in another!" He turned aside to conceal his tears, walked slowly to the door, and while the touch of his lips still seemed to linger on my hand, and his farewell to echo in my ears, he disappeared.

The door was open; the ordeal was over; the victory won!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Out in the Snow.

THE same evening, about nine o'clock, a chambermaid entered. Grave, respectful, almost obsequious, she came to tell me that a place had been secured for me in the stage coach that left town at six next morning; then she offered to assist me to undress. This service, however, I declined, saying, "I did not feel sleepy, and intended only to rest an hour or two on the couch." "Was there nothing she could do for me then?" I thanked her, "Nothing." She seemed disappointed, and lingered in the room. Then she looked at the fire and put on several large pieces of coal, saying, "It was a bitter night, and she feared I might feel cold; and by the way," she continued, "I'm glad I thought of it, you had better have a rug." And she went and brought one. Again I thanked her; this last piece of attention was very acceptable.

She had now no excuse for lingering, but she drew her muslin apron across the table, and said, "This has been a very sudden summons your husband has received?"

I made no effort to explain, and simply answered, "Very."

However much she desired to gratify her curiosity, she evidently saw that I was in no humour to do so, and making a virtue of necessity, she withdrew saying, "Good night, ma'am. Shall I call you in the morning?"

"No, thank you; it won't be necessary." And I almost smiled at the idea of me sleeping that night.

Next morning early I got up from my sleepless couch, washed and laved my face, neck, and arms in icy cold water, and was ready for my journey almost an hour before a sleepy waiter entered with the breakfast tray. I was still too much excited to feel hungry, nevertheless I made a point of drinking a cup of coffee, and eating a bit of toast, in anticipation of the long journey before me. I had just finished, when the landlord, *in propria persona*, entered, to conduct me to the coach. "Captain Moreton," he said, "had made him promise to do so before he left." I was touched at this mark of attention, and thinking of *him* gratefully, took the landlord's proffered arm. He put me in the best place, and stood, hat in hand, till the coach drove off. It was all the respect he could shew.

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The short December day had closed ere the lumbering stage coach, with its relays of jaded horses, reached Dunearn. Cold, stiff, and wearied, I got out, and prepared to trudge through soft snow and sloppy slush more than a mile to the outskirts of the town. In other circumstances, I would have ordered a cab, but I was deterred by the fact, that I had not a sixpence in my pocket, and by the fear of my reception at home. I drew my dress then well up, and encouraging myself with cheering hopes, and picturing to myself a kind welcome, set out bravely through the slushy snow. But how my heart did throb as I entered the well-known terrace, and approached the familiar door! How rapidly the cheering hopes with which I had buoyed myself up but a minute ago disappeared! How well I remembered my father's threat! Would he keep it now? would he turn me out on such a night as this? And then I could scarcely help regretting that I had not accepted Captain Moreton's offer; and drawing a comparison between myself as his wife, and my state at the present moment; between myself returning to my paternal home in an aristocratic carriage, to sue for pardon which would have been sure, certain, and yet of which I was independent; and myself, a weary wanderer, with a stain upon my fair name, with the cruel fear chilling my heart that I would be turned out as a waif and vagabond

on the face of the earth. I had thrown away bright earthly prospects for what the world and Captain Moreton called a myth. I was prepared for the world calling me a fool, would my parents call me one too?

With trembling limbs I ascended the steps, and timidly placed my hand upon the bell; but it was some time ere I ventured to give it a gentle pull. No one came. Perhaps it had not rung. With heart whose pulsations were fast becoming louder, I tried again. A light familiar footstep crossed the hall, the door was partly opened. "Jenny," I said, in a faltering voice. The door was flung wide open, to allow the light from the hall lamp to fall upon me, and then, with a scared face, Jenny shrieked out, "Miss Cecile! Alone, and at this time o' night!"

Her scream alarmed my mother, who hastened towards me. At sight of her I tried to speak, but my lips only quivered; my tongue refused its office. She looked so haggard and wretched; two days seemed to have done the work of years upon her. She trembled visibly, yet she said, with her own gentle calmness,

"My poor lost Cecile; you have come back sooner than I expected. Has he tired of you already?"

"Oh, mamma," I wailed, "I'm not the guilty thing you suppose; I was taken away against my will!"

She shook her head incredulously, and then casting a look of pity upon me, she said, "But you are cold and wearied. Come in."

I was about to move forward—for I had stood like a stranger outside the door—when my father, who had caught my mother's words as he came out of the parlour, cried, "No such thing, gudewife. If that's Cecile you're speakin' to, you may just tell her to gang as she's come; her shadow shall not darken my door. I've lost a daughter a'ready, I dinna intend to lose more through the example of such a hussey. No, no; away ye go," he continued, coming up to where I was standing, holding on by a door-post, to prevent myself from falling; "no, no; ye have made your bed, ye can lie upon it. Away ye go," he shouted in a louder voice, seeing I did not move; indeed I could not.

"Thomas," remonstrated my mother in an agitated voice, "whatever her errors, she is our first-born—our daughter!"

"Don't try to come over me!" shouted my father in a towering rage. "Daughter or no daughter, she shall go; and you shall go too, if ye say another word on the subject. Daughter! I wish she had been in her grave!" Then coming up to me, he pushed me somewhat roughly down the steps, and slammed the door close! And this was the end of it. Did not the Tempter triumph?

I sat down upon the lowest step, stupefied, be-

numbed, almost dead. Past feeling, I cared no longer what became of me. Death would have been a blessing; but I did not even wish to die. My garments were wet around me; the snow began to fall; it filled my long hair; the soft flakes covered me as a mantle; a strange happiness took possession of me; I gathered the snow in handfuls, and pressed it to my burning lips; I shut my eyes with drowsy pleasure; I fell asleep.

By and by I dreamed. Gentle voices were in mine ear, gentle hands were busy about me; Aggie's soft kisses were on my cheek; my mother's warm tears fell on my brow! Was I in heaven?

Anon I awoke. I was in a large handsome bed; a soft arm encircled my waist, a sweet breath fanned my cheek. I turned round; a dear familiar voice whispered, "Cecile, my own Cecile; whatever anybody says, I never—never will believe that you have done wrong. You will tell me all about it some time; but now you are not strong enough. You must just kiss me, and go to sleep again." Aggie was right; I was too weak for any exertion.

A week elapsed before I was able to crawl about the house again, and during that time I was sometimes sorely tempted to wish I had been left to my fate on the dripping door-step, for I felt keenly that my position in my father's house was entirely changed. Every one save Aggie looked upon me with estranged eyes. My mother even averted

her head and sighed when she spoke to me; my father never entered my room. I heard his somewhat heavy footstep pass and repass the door; I heard Susie's light laugh, the children's ringing voices; how I longed to fold them in my arms! but no, to father, to sister, to brothers I was as one dead. "Better to die than live," I thought, "than live in this state of disgrace; Oh to be in the grave with baby Charlie, my first, my purest love!" And when I thought of him, I wept and wished my father had left me to die. For after all it was him who saved my life, and this was how it happened. After cowing my mother and sisters into silent terror by his fearful wrath, he became restless, fidgetty, and must needs go out to post a letter. He did so, and of course stumbled over me. Instantly he returned, Aggie told me, as pale as a ghost, exclaiming, "Preserve us a'! Ye are leavin' your Cecile, your bonnie Cecile, to freeze to death in the snaw; she's dead already, if I'm no mistaken!" And without another word he plunged into the street and disappeared in the darkness. But my mother and sisters, set at liberty to follow their womanly instincts, acted differently, and with the assistance of Jenny carried me into the house and placed me on the best bed in the stranger's room—emblem of my fate, for was I not henceforth to be a stranger and alien in my father's house!

One of my first acts on regaining my strength

was to bundle up and despatch Mrs Brodie's crayon copies, with a note, thanking her for the use of them, and stating that, after what had occurred, she would not be surprised at my wish that all intercourse between us should be at an end. I might have spared myself the trouble it appeared, for next morning I received the following note:—"Miss Raye need not fear being burdened with Mrs Brodie's friendship, as she has too much respect for herself and her husband to associate with a young lady whose name, unfortunately, is in every one's mouth." It was nothing more than might have been expected, yet I felt hurt to think that she, the only one who knew my innocence, should be capable of writing in this strain. I told myself, "I despised her," but the wound still rankled; a reptile you can trample under foot can sting. With glowing cheek, I crumpled up her note, flung it in the fire, and watched till I saw the last morsel consumed in the flames. Thus ended my ill-judged—my fatal friendship with Mrs Brodie!

I had now resumed my usual place in the household, and my old seat at the table. In my father's presence no one, not even Aggie, ventured to speak to me, and he himself acted as if he wished to ignore my existence—he whose delight and pride I had ever been! Ah, it was hard to bear, and but for an inward consciousness of innocence I should have sunk under it.

Not a day passed but I was constantly, in one form or other, reminded of my humiliation and disgrace; and a thousand acts trifling in themselves, that in other circumstances would have passed unnoticed, now acquired in my eyes fearful significance. Besides Aggie, another staunch friend, however, now appeared upon the scene. Yes, let me do him justice. Robert Macgregor, with whom for years I had scarcely exchanged a word, now suddenly re-appeared in our family circle. For reasons of his own he had left our house and boarded in town on the plea of being nearer the office (my father believed it, *I* knew better), and from one year's end to another seldom was seen at Waterloo Terrace. Now, however, on one pretence or another an evening scarcely passed but he came there, and in my absence (I was always absent in the evening) never failed to espouse my cause manfully and boldly. Aggie and he managed to convince my mother that my story was true, (poor creature, she was no doubt anxious to believe it), which was a step, a great step gained. But still the darkening shadow hung over our house; "A good name is better than riches," but a young woman's good name, ah Solomon! cannot be compared—*dare* not, I should say, be compared—with the richest treasures that earth can produce.

But a trial more severe than any I had yet met was now at hand. Our communion was approach-

ing; I was a member of the church. One morning our district elder, James Clink, called. He was a plain, hard-working man, not over-burdened with the refinements nor the amenities of life; remarkable, nevertheless, for his strict and uncompromising piety. I was in the parlour when he entered; he glanced at me sternly, and asked for my mother. I was about to leave the room. He lifted his eyes from the floor, and said, "Wait, Miss Cecile; what I hae to say spaicially concerns you. Will your mother, think ye, be lang o' comin'?"

"No, I do not think so," I said. And ere the words were well out of my mouth she came in.

James rose and held out his hand, saying, "I dar'say you ken my errant." She trembled, and glanced involuntarily at me.

"Yes, I see you're richt," he said, following her eye; "this is a grievous business, a sad business, a most humblin' business" (he shook his head). "Ay, when folk bring bairns int' the world, they little think what sorrow an' sufferin' they are bringin' upon themselves; ye would hae been better pleased, would na ye, to hae seen her in her grave?" And he pointed to me as he spoke.

"Yes, if she had been guilty," replied my mother, in an air of calmness that astonished me; "but Cecile is not guilty, she has been cruelly maligned; but I am convinced that God will yet

bring out her innocence, and cause her righteousness to shine as the noonday."

I gave my mother such a look of gratitude. Aggie had told me that she believed I spoke the truth; but never before had she said a single word in my defence. James, however, seemed disconcerted. The corners of his mouth fell, and he shook his head sadly as he said, "I maun say, I'm greatly disappointed, Mistress Raye; I had expected that a woman o' your sense and Christian discretion would have spoken and acted differently; that you would have cast oot the unholy thing; that you would have plucked oot a right eye rather than offend your Maker; but I suppose," he added still more sternly, "it's just sinful, frail, human nature; and I daursay maist mithers would do the same."

"I will believe in my daughter's innocence till her guilt is proved."

"Guilt!" interrupted James, somewhat rudely, "everybody can prove that. Didna she rin awa wi' an officer at the dead o' nicht? an' if that's no guilt, I dinna ken what guilt is. Everybody says she did it, and what everybody says maun be true!"

"That might be all explained," said my mother calmly, "were you disposed to listen to reason."

"Reason," said James, "I did not come here to reason, I came here to do my duty! Yes, and it shall be done," he continued, rising from his seat

and striking the floor with his staff, "be she gentle or semple." Then turning to me, he said, in a solemn voice, "Cecile Raye, I came here to debar ye, in the name o' the Kirk and the Kirk-Session, from approaching to profane the Lord's table on this occasion of high and holy communion."

I hid my face in my hands and sobbed aloud. Only those brought up as I had been can know what a fearful thing this ban of excommunication was.

The old man seemed pleased at my tears, and commenced such a fearful lecture on my vanity, my worldliness, and folly, that, bruised reed as I was, I was almost crushed under his terrors of hell, and weight of words. "And it was for this—this harsh, dark, cruel thing called religion," whispered the Tempter, "that you gave up rank, station, and Captain Moreton!"

Later in the same day, our venerable minister called to soften matters; but as he was powerless of himself to remove the ban, he only made them worse. He was of a different stamp, however, from the elder; his eye was full of pity and gentleness when he looked at me; his words of tenderness when he addressed me; and the tears I shed when he put his hand on my head, and stroked my hair as he did when I was a child, were sweet and soothing. He prayed with us and departed.

Not all dark, however; the cloud shewed a bit of its silver lining when Lady Blanche Drummond

called the next day. She had sent up her card immediately after my return, but I was in bed and unable to see her. Now she came again. "Had she heard the rumours?" I asked myself as I went up stairs to the drawing-room. I trembled as I entered. I looked anxiously in her face. It was enough; we threw ourselves into each other's arms and wept. Then she held me from her at arms' length, and looked at me with such holy, pitying eyes, that I almost fancied her an angel come down to soothe my sorrow. "Poor, poor Cecile," she at last said, "what you must have suffered!"

"How did you know?" I asked; "who told you?"

He wrote me,—*he* told me all,—he conjured me, by the love I once bore to him, to go to you and drag you out of the slough of infamy into which his foolish, wicked conduct had plunged you. O Cecile, if you only saw his letter, much as he has caused you to suffer, you would pity, you would forgive him!"

"I do pity, I have forgiven him," I said.

"And you loved him?"

"Yes, and you, Lady Blanche?" raising my blushing face to hers, as I put the question.

"I loved him; I do love him; I will love him to my dying day," she said earnestly and solemnly. "O Cecile, what a man he would be if he possessed the *one thing needful!* And do you know," she

continued, her face brightening, "I am not without hopes—better hopes of him than I have had for many a day; and you, my poor little scapegoat, will have proved the blessed instrument. O Cecile, I almost envy you! But come now," she continued, changing her tone, and almost smiling her own smile, "I am forgetting; I did not come here to talk, but to do business. I have a great deal of shopping in hand, and I want you to come with me."

I murmured something about "never having been out, and not liking to go out."

"Exactly, I understand; but you see I'm going to take you whether you like or not. Run now, there's a good girl, and change that dowdy dress; put on your best, nothing else will do; and be quick, do" (seeing I still lingered), "I have a great deal to do."

I saw through her well-meant stratagem, but I could'nt refuse her. I obeyed her orders; hastened to my room; changed my dress; and in a few minutes was seated in the carriage beside her. We drove slowly through all the principal streets; we stopped and made purchases in all the principal shops. All Dunearn saw us; all Dunearn stared at us; and all Dunearn thought there could not be much wrong with Miss Raye, when she was driving about with Lady Blanche Drummond!

CHAPTER XXIX.

A Message from the Ocean.

THE New Year was ushered in by a succession of fearful gales such as had not been known for long; indeed, it was said that the like had not occurred within the memory of the oldest inhabitant of Dunearn.

Fearful tales of shipwreck and suffering were reported in every morning's paper, and while my father read them aloud with many an expression of pity and many a sigh over the sufferings of the poor men, Aggie's cheek paled, and I trembled for her and for him in whom her happiness was centred.

Often by the midnight lamp, when the howling tempestuous winds prevented us from sleeping, did we sisters rise and consult the map to ascertain in what latitude "The Bride of the Ocean" was likely to be, and to console ourselves

with the belief that she was far from the dangerous vicinity of these storms. But as they continued, and as the account of their ravages daily increased, Aggie's anxiety increased also to such an extent that night after night her weary head was laid upon her pillow, but not to sleep: to watch, to weep, to pray was now the duty of those long winter nights.

Such vigils did not improve her health. The colour—the bright yet soft vermilion of her cheek often fled, and there was a careworn harassed expression on her face, her sweet pensive face, that was distressing to see. I tried to soothe, my mother to console her; but our united efforts proved ineffectual, a cruel presentiment had taken possession of her which would not be shaken off.

One morning my father was seated after breakfast reading as usual the *Shipping Gazette*, in which paper he was much interested, apart altogether from storm and shipwreck, as much, indeed the greater part, of his property was on the ocean, and at the mercy of wind and weather. It was the 31st of January, and the snow which had fallen, and frozen, and drifted into heaps during the early part of the month, was receiving a fresh accession in the large soft flakes that were rapidly falling outside the window. Within all was as usual snug, cosy comfort. Bright fire reflected in bright grate, and brighter fire-irons. Breakfast equipage still on the table, but no spot on the snowy table-cloth.

Aggie was bending over the large open Bible from which my father, in the ordinary course, had been reading a portion of the hundred and seventh psalm. Her brow was slightly contracted and a hectic spot burned on either cheek; but the drooping lid with its hazel lashes was beautiful as ever. Susie was busy working with her white, fat, dimpled fingers at an intricate crochet edging as industriously as if her livelihood depended on the result of her labour. I was standing idly beside the window, apparently watching the fast-falling snow, but in reality thinking dreamily and sadly of the past.

My father laid the paper across his knees, and said suddenly and unexpectedly, "Cecile."

I started at the sound of my name uttered by his voice; it was the first time he had addressed me directly since the night of my return. I turned round, and with eyes fixed on the ground listened to what he was about to say.

"Cecile," he repeated, "I had almost forgotten to tell you a thing of considerable importance, which in the circumstances o' the case I'm proud of, and which, considerin' what has happened, I think you hae great reason to be proud o', too. Mr Miller came the other day, and in the most honourable and straightforward way, asked my leave to come and pay his addresses (I think that was what he said); but he means to court ye, of course, wi' the view o' makin' ye his wife."

"And what did you say, papa?" I ventured to ask.

"What did I say? What could I say, but ae thing?" he exclaimed, his temper rising. "I said 'ye were scarcely good enough for an honest man's wife; but if he was pleased, it was nae business of mine;' and I thanked him for his honourable conduct, and asked him to come an' take a cup o' tea wi' us the night, when I had no doot ye would be glad to see him, ay, an' proud to the bargain."

"Oh, papa!" I cried, "how could you say that? I never, never could love Mr Miller."

"Love him, no!" answered my father bitterly; "I never was such a fool to expect that you would; but I thought ye would be glad to get him for a' that. No, no; it's only curly haired, white handed dandies that you love. If you had behaved like little Aggie there, I would have been proud, perhaps owre proud o' you; but wae's me! wae's me!"

"Oh papa, papa!" I cried, "how can you be so cruel?"

But he had buried his head in his paper again, and made no answer. These were the first words since the eventful night in December he had spoken to me. Alas! alas! they were cruel words, and they were almost the *last* he ever uttered! Strange that we should be ever thus thinking of the past, dreaming of the future, while the all-powerful, ever-present Now holds our fate in his hands!

After an exchange of sympathising looks, Aggie's head bent over the Bible again, and I turned to the snow-flakes and bitter bitter thought. Was it always so to be? Was my father never to believe me other than a guilty, fallen creature? And this man, this Mr Miller, disliked by me in girlhood, before I knew what it was to love, now tenfold more so, if possible, was I to be compelled to marry him? I pressed my head against the window; the iron entered my soul!

"God Almighty preserve us all!" exclaimed my father. I started. It must be something dreadful. I never heard my father utter an oath in his life before. It *was* something dreadful. The paper had fallen from my father's hand; his teeth were set, his eyes fixed; a low gurgling sound proceeded from his throat; he was in the act of falling from his chair. I was in time to prevent this, however, and caught him in my arms ere he fell to the ground. Alarmed, terrified as we were, we sisters uttered no scream. Aggie and I supported our poor father till Susie ran for assistance; then we had him carried quietly and gently to the large bed in the strangers' room, which I still occupied; and while one ran for medical assistance, we used what simple remedies were at hand to restore him from the fit into which he had fallen. I never left his bed-side, but gentle Aggie went to our dear mother's room, broke the sad intelligence as softly as possible, and prepared her for the coming of

the doctor. By the time he came she was dressed, and in the chamber, looking very pale, but calm, composed, and with a look of Christian resignation on her face that was beautiful to see. The doctor, after examination, pronounced my father's illness "apoplexy." My mother started; her father had died of that disease. "Will my husband recover?" she asked tremblingly. "It is possible," replied the doctor; "at all events, we must hope for the best, and act for the best. Mr Raye has every advantage; he has a good constitution, has led a temperate life, and is still a comparatively young man. How old is he?"

"Not fifty yet," replied my mother.

"Then we *shall hope* for the best," said the doctor more cheerfully. Everything that medical skill could do for my poor father was done, but he never rallied—never. He lingered on for three days, and then—my mother was a widow, his children fatherless!

To say that our grief was great would be to say little. My father, notwithstanding his somewhat impetuous temper, had always been kind and indulgent in the extreme to us his children, and to my gentle, delicate mother, ever tender and considerate. But my grief had a sting, a barbed arrow in it, which turned it, alas! to bitter anguish. He had died with a cruel suspicion against me resting on his mind. He had thought me, his first-born, unworthy to be his daughter; and as I gazed

in agony upon his still, cold features, and thought of what I had once been to him, and told myself there was no chance—none, of his ever knowing my innocence, of his ever smiling upon me with his own loving fatherly smile again, I moaned aloud in the bitterness of my heart. But it would be all clear now, I remembered, in the bright world to which he was gone. "Perhaps even now," I thought, "his happy spirit, released from the doubts and clouds of this dark world, is looking down on me with eyes of love and pity!"

My father had been respected in his life; he was honoured on his death. Arrangements had been made for a quiet, private funeral, but this, at the pressing instance of the community in which he had so long lived, was set aside for a public one. And even as a public one the demonstration of sorrow and respect was greater than we expected. The shops were shut along the line of procession; the ships in the harbour hoisted their colours half-mast high; the sailors, to a man, followed the hearse of him who had ever been their most devoted friend; while conspicuous in the long line of mourning carriages was seen the chariot of the Earl of Kinkeld. Ah, people may talk as they like, but, sooner or later, the world never fails to appreciate and acknowledge consistent Christian merit. In many cases, undoubtedly, such merit is hid in obscurity, or veiled by poverty; but when, as in my father's case, God places its possessor in

a conspicuous position, and blesses him with the means of doing good, then, wicked as the world is, he becomes its idol! So Dunearn mourned for its most influential merchant, cut down in a moment in the midst of health and prosperity. But in the midst of its mourning, whispers, scarcely breathed at first, became louder and louder, till they reached even my ears in our desolate and darkened house; whispers, dark and cruel, as to the cause of his death. Must I write them down? must I lacerate my torn heart still more by penning the odious suspicions? must I tell the sad story that I, his wretched daughter, was blamed for causing his death, for breaking his heart? Alas! alas! "And might it not be true?" From morning to night I asked myself over and over again this heart-rending question, "Might it not be true? might it not be true?" And then, with a species of untold agony, I would exclaim, "My punishment is greater than I can bear!"

The funeral was over. The blinds were drawn up. Our house outwardly assumed its wonted aspect, but inwardly how different! A familiar step was missed; a familiar voice was hushed; a familiar face was gone, gone never more to be seen on earth again! A place was vacant at table; an easy chair stood by the fireside empty! A loving and beloved wife sat a widow, silent, resigned; with no word of plaint upon her lips; but with a wound in her heart which would fester and rankle

there during the rest of her life; children glanced tearfully, fearfully at the empty chair, or in low subdued tones spoke of their father. Commonplace incidents, all! sadly too commonplace; but all the more touching, all the more telling, on that very account! It is true, indeed, there was an effort made to overcome this. There was a putting to rights, a setting in order; there was washing, scouring, cleaning; there was everything done that poor mortals can do to get rid of the cloud of gloom which still hung like a pall over our hearts and home; to shake off the shivering chill left by the touch of the cold, cruel hand; but, alas! alas! what can obliterate the furrows made in wounded and bleeding hearts by the iron of thy desolating ploughshare—O Death!

A few days after the funeral, I happened to enter a kind of lumber room, in which a considerable quantity of waste paper had been thrust. Glancing over it with indifference, my eye was nevertheless arrested by the title of a newspaper, a title which must evermore be connected in my mind with the saddest associations. It was a crumpled copy of the *Shipping Gazette*. I lifted it carefully; smoothed out the cresses on my knee; glanced at the date, and found it was the very paper my father was reading when death struck him down. With tears in my eyes, and a species of trembling reverence in my heart, I commenced scanning, with a kind of melancholy pleasure, the otherwise

uninteresting column of names of vessels reported as arriving at or leaving different ports; as spoken to at sea; as passing the Sound; or as touching at the Cape. I came next to miscellaneous pieces of shipping intelligence. Among which, with a thickening mist before my eyes, and a strange choking feeling in my breast, I read: "There are too good grounds to fear that a large East Indiaman has foundered at sea, off Cape Coromandel. Planks and pieces of wreck have been picked up; a bottle, also, with the following message:—'On board "The Bride of the Ocean." Ship fast sinking; crew all taken to the boats, save Captain and me. No hope, none! May God have mercy on us. I implore you, convey this information to my poor father, to Mr Raye, to C. and A. Tell them all that in a few, few years we shall meet again, never, never to part. Farewell!

"'My only trust and stay in this hour of death is the blood and merits of my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.'"

It is scarcely necessary to say I could read no more. The mist before my eyes became darkness. The paper slipped from my hands. My poor father! this had been his death blow. Not the loss of property, for his ships were all well insured, but the loss of the crew, and of his faithful captain, who had been nearly twenty years in his service, had proved too much for his feeling heart.

It was some time before I regained sufficient

composure to pick up the fatal paper; and to think, as I slowly folded it in the smallest possible compass and placed it in my bosom, how to break the news it contained to poor Aggie. My heart bled for her and for Frank; my own Frank. Yes, in sadness and sorrow, I remembered all the love I once bore him. I might call him my *own* now; and think, with love which had only smouldered, of the bright young head which lay many a fathom deep among the coral wreaths of the distant Indian Ocean.

Could my cup of misery hold one drop more?

CHAPTER XXX.

You won't forget poor Aggie?

SPRING flowers were on the ground, but snow still whitened the Grampian tops, and lay thick and deep in many a treacherous wreath in glen and hollow, when Aggie walked quietly up to her room and lay down on the bed—our own little bed, with its spotless dimity curtains—from which she was never to rise again.

She knew this; we all knew it. She did not wish it otherwise; we did not repine. Death had become during the last three months sadly, I had almost said sweetly, familiar. To crushed and broken hearts, was not he the "messenger of peace"? and I sometimes almost envied Aggie as she lay quiet and gentle with a light in her eye, and an expression serene and holy resting on her sweet face, waiting for the last summons and slowly fading away. But Aggie, young as she was, was ripe for glory; indeed, glory claimed her even

already. There was nothing of decay about her. The glowing cheek retained the roundness of its soft outlines; the hazel eye gleamed with glorious brightness; the forehead looked like Parian under the heavy bands of auburn hair. And yet she was dying! The doctor said in a few weeks, or a few months at most, she must leave us. And yet she had few symptoms of pain. But her breath came fast and quick, and utter prostration seized her. Soon her limbs lost all power, and she became unable to turn herself in bed without assistance. Yes, Aggie was dying, and the end was rapidly approaching. While the flowers covered the face of the earth with beauty, while birds sang and hedgerows blossomed, while orchards whitened and furze-covered knolls became golden in the sweet, delicious spring time, I sat day by day, night by night, watching the passing away of sister Aggie—the last of my earthly idols. Sometimes when I would be performing any little offices for her, wetting the parched lips, adjusting her pillow, she would put her arms round my neck, press her cheek against mine, and lavish on me words of tenderest endearment. And Aggie was dying! why might not I die with her? For me the furnace had already been heated sevenfold. Must I live—live to be again compelled to pass through its fiery heat? Why should I live? Frank was gone, my father was gone, Aggie was going! Then I remembered my mother, desolate and a

widow, and my heart smote me. Might it not be mine to soothe her declining years; to make up to her in some measure for what she had lost? *Yes, it was mine.* I rejoiced to feel the strong, healthy pulsations of the young blood in my veins; and rejoicing on her account, I blamed my own selfishness; I no longer wished to die.

During the two months that Aggie lingered with us, Lady Blanche was almost a daily visitor, and passed many hours every day in the chamber of our gentle sister. The sweetest and choicest flowers from the gardens and conservatories of Kinkeld House were her pleasant and unfailing gift. And while our own sweet flower was slowly fading away, her pathway to the tomb was literally strewed with nature's floral gems.

There was nothing of death in that chamber where Lady Blanche and I sat and watched; talking to Aggie of the "better land" to which she was going, or reading to her portions of the Blessed Book which she had long loved so well. Nothing of death! The soft summer wind fluttered the muslin curtains through the open casement; the foliage of a large elm in the garden threw its flickering shadow on the white papering of the sunlit wall; the sweet breath of heliotrope and violets filled the apartment; and the music of Lady Blanche's voice, as she read in a low, soft, almost monotonous tone, fell upon the ear like a soothing lullaby.

When Aggie was able to bear it, we sometimes talked on topics in which all three felt a tender interest,—Lady Blanche's two cousins, Frank Innes Drummond and Captain Moreton; strange the ties that united our plebeian family with the lordly house of Kinkeld! Frank's loss had been as sincerely, though not perhaps quite so tenderly, mourned over by the Earl and his daughter as by us. Of Captain Moreton we learned that, exchanging, as he had promised to do, into a regiment ordered for India, just on the eve of its departure these orders had been suddenly countermanded, and it now lay at Malta ready at a moment's notice to be thrown on Russian territory, possibly the Crimea, to which, in the event of the threatened hostilities, every eye was now directed. And I noticed, while Lady Blanche told us this, that there was an effort made to retain composure, and that her pale cheek became paler. Aggie was a most interested listener in all that concerned the happiness of those she loved, and one day after Lady Blanche had gone she said, drawing my cheek to hers, and putting her arms round my neck in her own pretty way, "The clouds are fast falling from my sight, Cecile, I seem to see and understand everything so much better than I used to do; and I'm persuaded that gentle Lady Blanche will be happy yet, even in this world, and that she will be united yet to the man she has so long and tenderly loved."

I was not so sanguine on this point, and answered her by saying, "Do you think so, Aggie?"

"Sure of it, Cecile, sure of it; I wish I were as sure of another thing on which poor, foolish, dying Aggie has set her heart." And she smiled faintly.

"Aggie, dearest, darling Aggie!" I said eagerly, "if it's anything in the wide world that I can do for you, or satisfy you upon, it shall be done."

"I know that, my own Cecile," she replied, pressing her burning lips against my cheek; "but neither you nor any one else in the world can assure me of it; indeed, I'm afraid it is the remains of sin in my heart that makes me even wish for it;" she added meekly, "I should have no wish but God's will; His will should be mine. Is that not it, Cecile?" And her tears began to flow.

I soothed her, and said, "But, my own Aggie, I am sure that you have no wish which is not in accordance with His will."

"Ah!" she replied, almost reproachfully, "you do not know the deceitfulness of my heart; but I trust and pray to be made '*meet for the inheritance of the saints*'—to be made fair in His presence, adorned in the garment, the glorious garment of my Redeemer's righteousness!" And Aggie was silent; but the tears passed away and the eyes gleamed anew with the light of holy faith.

And so the days and the weeks glided on, till it became very evident to us anxious onlookers that Aggie was approaching very near the banks of the

river. Restless, feverish nights—weary, listless days; a longing for night—for night which brought no sleep to those wide-open eyes; a restless watching for morning—which brought no soothing. Ah! the conqueror of our race, conquered though he is, arrays himself still in terrors. Earnestly did we pray that the Great Conqueror would deprive him of his terrors for our poor Aggie, and make her feel that his sting was taken away. Earnestly did we pray that when she walked through the waters she might feel *His* presence with her—that the risings of the dark river might not overwhelm her soul.

And so—watching, weeping, praying—the days went on, and the summons came at last.

One lovely morning in early June, Aggie, who had not spoken for many days, whispered in my ear, "Cecile, dearest, darling Cecile, I must bid you farewell. I shall not see another morning. I know it—God revealed it to me last night. I had such a dream, Cecile, and yet it could scarcely be called a dream, it was too much like reality, and I don't think I slept, only my spirit was caught away up—up to the glorious company in heaven—and my eyes and ears were ravished by such sights and sounds as no earthly language could describe. But in a few short years you shall hear and see them for yourself, my own sister. You must not weep, Cecile, for, oh, I'm so happy! And, O Cecile! from amidst the glorious

throng a bright young spirit approached. I knew him at once, Cecile; it was Charlie, your own baby Charlie! And he told me that in another day I must come up hither, and that I must prepare for the supper of the Lamb. And I smiled and told him that I had no preparation to make, that my wedding garment had been prepared for me a long time ago—before the foundation of the world. Was I not right, Cecile, dear?"

"Quite, quite, Aggie, darling," I replied sobbing hysterically, for, though I felt I ought to rejoice, I could do nothing—nothing but weep, weep. I knew the summons had come; I knew that such bright visions were sometimes vouchsafed to Christians just before entering the dark valley—before stepping into the cold waters. I read *death* in her unnatural strength, in her freedom from restlessness and pain. I read it even in the sweet slumber into which she soon fell; but I read it, alas, far more painfully in the long grey shadowy lines which in slanting lines were crossing her fair forehead. And in very bitterness of heart I clasped my hands together and uttered a loud and piercing cry, but it did not disturb my own Aggie; she was rapidly becoming indifferent to the sounds of this world, even to the voice of her she loved the best. All day she slumbered and slept. Some in the house were tempted to think it might be the turn, but I knew better; *the shadowy lines were deepening, lengthen-*

ing. The doctor paid his usual visit. He did not think it necessary to feel her pulse. He glanced at me, and, I suppose, read my fears in my face, for he said, "You are right, Miss Raye; your sister is fast sinking. Does your mother know?"

"Yes," I answered in a low voice, "she is in the next room; we thought it better to keep this as cool and quiet as possible."

"Right, quite right," he replied.

Then, in words which I could scarcely render articulate, I ventured to ask, "How long?" and then my voice refused to say more.

"Till midnight, I should say; not longer." Another question hung on my lips, but I trembled and feared to put it. And yet I could not let him go without asking it. My lips moved, but they uttered no sound. He was about to leave the room. I clutched his coat convulsively, "One word, doctor. Will she pass away thus? or—or will there be suffering, a struggle?" And I placed my hands before my eyes.

"I can't say definitely, Miss Raye," he replied, in a soothing tone of voice; "but I think I can assure and relieve you on one point: a struggle there may be, suffering there will not be."

"Thank God; thank God!" I exclaimed fervently. I felt as if I could kiss the hem of the good doctor's garment.

He looked at me with moistened eyes, and departed.

The long summer day passed slowly; every hour

miserably long, and yet every hour miserably regretted. The shades of night fell; my anxiety, my agony increased. I shut the window, and drew down the blinds with trembling hands. Others had come and gone, but I had never left the room. All day I watched that sweet dying face; all day I had listened anxiously to that soft breathing; all day I had fasted, wept, and prayed. And now the night was come!

I sat by the bedside. There was a gentle movement. The large hazel eyes opened once more. I saw them yet again. I had feared I should never see them more in this world. "Cecile," she whispered, "where are you?" I pressed her hand, I kissed her cheek, and then I said, "Here! here! my own sweetest darling." She looked so refreshed, so composed, so calm, that I almost made myself believe that I was mistaken, that we were all mistaken, that she was not dying after all!

"Cecile," she said again, "come close that I may tell you—tell you how good God is; I shall be happy, happy in this world for a brief moment before I go. Oh how happy! Do you know that the only thing in this world that I have ever desired earnestly, ardently, is about to be accomplished. Listen, he is there now; that is his foot on the stairs." The hectic glow rushed into her cheek, the light to her eye, she looked excited in the highest degree.

"Alas!" I thought, "poor Aggie's mind wanders at last!" I attempted to soothe her, but she would not be soothed; she repeated again, "Listen!"

Thus entreated, I withdrew my attention from my dying sister and listened. There certainly was a suppressed stir in the house, and whispered voices outside the room. What could it all mean? Aggie looked at me beseechingly, "Cecile, if you love me, I entreat you go out and bring him in; I must see him to-night, and my time is short!"

I rose to obey her request, wondering inwardly who the "him" could mean. I went out, drawing the door gently close behind me. I did not require to wonder long. I heard the whisper of a voice once dearly familiar. I looked over the balustrade down into the hall, and saw—did my eyes deceive me?—and saw Frank, looking, after his three years' absence, stouter, manlier, and handsomer than ever! For a moment I forgot Aggie in the wild tumult of joy that filled my heart at seeing Frank, my own Frank, safe and well, but the next the joy quickly gave place to the sad, sad reality. I glided down stairs quietly and entered the little group who had surrounded Frank, and were telling him the sorrowful intelligence. I put my hand in his. "Frank," I said, "by what means I cannot tell, Aggie knows you are here, and she must see you immediately." My mother interposed, "Cecile, the shock will be too much for her; it will kill her."

"Mamma," I said calmly, "Aggie is dying; to prevent her seeing Frank may hasten her end, at all events it can do no good. In my opinion it would be absolute cruelty." Then, remembering

that I had left her alone, I exclaimed, "She may be dead now!" and saying to Frank, "Follow me," I rushed up stairs to the room.

On entering, I saw that Aggie had turned her head, and, with wide open eyes, was watching the door. She made no sign or sound when I entered; but when, almost immediately after, Frank followed, she raised her eyes upward, and clasped her hands in the attitude of prayer.

Frank approached the bedside slowly, softly. She held out her hand, and whispered, "God is good." He took the poor little wasted hand in both of his; he pressed his lips upon it, and then, in a voice husky and hoarse with emotion, he said, "And is it thus that I find my own little Aggie, my own affianced bride?"

"Frank, dearest, best-beloved," she replied, "you must not speak that way now. I no longer belong to earth; I belong to the Lamb; and am going—going even now!" She shuddered convulsively. She gasped for breath.

Frank turned aside his head, and exclaimed, "Ah, was it for this—for this—that I was picked up from the wreck more dead than alive? for this, O God!"

She looked at him with a long look of yearning sadness; and then, in words which were gradually becoming weaker, she whispered, "Yes, Frank, for this; but where's Cecile?"

"Here! here, my darling," I replied, laying my cheek against hers.

"That's right," she murmured, "my own Cecile." A faint flush came upon her face, and a sweet smile irradiated her features. She took my hand in one of hers, the other still lay between Frank's, and murmuring, "Yes, it was for this," she placed my hand in his. Then adding, "You will love her Frank; now, thank God, I shall die happy—oh, so happy!" She placed her hand on ours, as if to keep them from unclasping; shut her eyes, and seemed to fall into a gentle slumber.

But it did not last long. She awoke with a kind of start, and with more energy than was natural to her, even in health, exclaimed, "And Frank, if anybody should ever say anything wrong of Cecile, you must not believe it; Cecile never did, never could, do any wrong." Then making sure that our hands were still clasped, she smiled a bright smile, and said, "You will be happy. Farewell—fare—well; you won't forget poor Aggie!"

I doubt whether she heard our weeping, "Never—never," for her mouth fell slightly; her eyes closed, and after a slight convulsive movement or two, she fell asleep. The little cold hand placed on ours became colder; it relaxed its hold; it fell by her side. Frank stole out for my mother and Susie. For an hour we watched the soft breathing. For an hour we listened for the slightest sound of pain. None came, but a light not of earth illuminated her countenance, and in a gentle slumber Aggie passed away!

CHAPTER XXXI.

Reaping in Joy.

AND now what more have I to tell? One, two, three years ran their usual course —three years bringing soothing and healing on their wings, and binding up with their tender touch the wounds of bruised and bleeding hearts. Content and prosperity reigned in our household. Robert Macgregor took the sole management of my father's business in behalf of my widowed mother and family. We were very grateful to him; I was very grateful. Poor fellow, I daresay he expected, and I am sure he deserved, something better at my hands than mere gratitude, but it could not be. I consoled myself, however, with the hope that by and by Susie might with her young unscorched heart reward him, and prove to him a loving and beloved wife. Nor were my hopes disappointed, though several years elapsed before they were fulfilled.

Georgina Macduff, my quondam school-friend, had disappeared from my sight, and been almost forgotten during my years of sorrow and suffering, She now appeared somewhat suddenly and unexpectedly on the scene, by calling on my mother and me to announce her intended marriage. Poor girl; notwithstanding her spiral ringlets, and thin waist, and flirting powers, she was rapidly verging into old-maidenism. Her face looked sharp and thin, and lines of care were shewing themselves round her mouth and about the corners of her eyes. Georgina had had many disappointments; she had flirted, and danced, and waltzed with cornets, ensigns, and young lawyers, till she had almost become a piece of public property. She had been so much in the public eye, that her dashing handsome figure was known even at the length of a street. She had often been on the eve of her marriage, but the morning of it never came. For some months past, however, she had been contenting herself with a lower flight, and the result had proved more satisfactory. Failing to strike a hawk, she had brought down a sparrow, and evidently was determined to plume herself on her prey. Mr Millar had offered, and been accepted, and Georgina was in high spirits about the fine house he had taken in Blenheim Place, and the handsome style in which he was furnishing it. The corn merchant was neither so handsome nor polished as the ensigns and lawyers, but he had

been a steady, plodding man, and had made a great deal of money. If comfort, and ease, and wealth are better than romance, dash, and poverty, then Georgina perhaps had no reason to regret the failure of her other matrimonial speculations.

During those three years, too, Mr Brodie and his wife had been a nine days' wonder. One morning he awoke, to find that his wife, round whom all the affections of his manly heart had for years centred—his wife, who, whatever others might think or say of her, in his eyes could do no wrong, had abandoned him and his three young children, to elope with a handsome actor nearly ten years her junior. Poor Mr Brodie! As a man sows, so shall he reap. He never held up his head again, but died broken-hearted in a few years after.

And so the three years came and went, and the turf was green, and the snowdrops white, on the graves of the loved and lost, when the peaceful monotony of our daily life was broken one morning by the arrival of two gentlemen. I need scarcely mention their names. Changed they were both of them since I last saw them. During those three years they had borne the burden and heat of the day. They had fought together in that fatal Crimean campaign where England's best blood had flowed like water. Frank in those famous wooden walls which, in presence of the Russian fortress, for once proved so powerless; and Captain Moreton on the heights of Alma, in the grey mists

of Inkerman, in the wet and muddy trenches, and, last of all, in the carnage of the fearful Redan! He had been wonderfully preserved through all. Many were the hair-breadth escapes he had had, many were the accounts of his gallantry and bravery; and now he returned to his country laden with honours. Scarred and bronzed he looked, but there were lines of thought on his face, a pensive and serene expression on his brow, and a holy light in his eye, which more than compensated for the almost effeminate beauty of other days. Yes, Colonel Moreton was a changed man! Ah, how many a battle fought and won over a stronger than mortal foe did that glorious Crimea witness! In the midst of blood and carnage, or under the cloudless moon in midnight trench, how many a young soldier gained the greatest of victories, the victory over his own heart, and fought the hardest of battles—the battle with sin and self! Yes, Colonel Moreton was a changed man; he had proved it by his deeds! He had ministered to the sick, he had tended the wounded, he had read and prayed with the dying. He held prayer meetings with his men, and distributed thousands of tracts and Bibles among those who possessed them not. A changed man! his mother's—ay, and others'—prayers were answered!

He came with Frank, to ask my mother's—to ask my pardon. He did not need; they had long

since been granted. Henceforth he must ever be one of our dearest, most respected friends.

And Frank—my own Frank—my dearest, my best-beloved—loved for his own sake, loved doubly so for the sake of another, with what joy did I see him again! with what throbbings of heart and dewy mistiness of eyes did I hear him ask me to be his wife! Could I refuse him? could I refuse to gratify *her* dying wish? could I do injustice to my own heart?

We went together to her grave; we wept over it; and we vowed, by the grace of God, so to live that we might meet *her* in glory.

Lady Blanche and I were married on the same day. It was her wish, and I had no reason to oppose it. Since the day of our strangely-formed acquaintance, she had been to me like the gentlest of sisters in sunshine and sorrow—in darkness and under bereavement. I need not describe that double wedding; indeed I could not. All the usual accompaniments of such a scene were there; but the tremblings of emotion, the gushings of the heart, the thanksgiving, the gratitude, the blendings of the shadowy Past with the bright hues of the Future, who could describe?

Years have come and gone since that day, but we have never had reason to regret it. Pain has been felt, and tears have been shed, but loving hands have wiped away the one, and loving hearts

have soothed the other. The Earl of Kinkeld did not long survive his daughter's marriage, but he lived long enough to know that she was happy, and to bless her first-born son. His brother, my own Frank's father (how I love to write his name!), survived him but a few months, and from that time Kinkeld House and estates became his as heir of entail. Since that time the old house has been our home; sounds of childish voices resound through its lofty halls. A chubby-faced Frank, a soft-eyed Aggie, and roguish Gerald, play around our knees. What more could we have? Truly our cup overflows with blessings, and my lips quiver with gratitude as I repeat the words, *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*

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